













AN  
**APOLOGY** *N<sup>o</sup> 18.*  
FOR THE  
**LIFE OF MR. COLLEY CIBBER.**  
*COMEDIAN AND PATENTEE OF THE THEATRE ROYAL.*  
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.  
AND INTERSPERSED WITH  
**CHARACTERS AND NOTES**  
OF  
**Theatrical Contemporaries ;**  
THE WHOLE FORMING A  
**COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE STAGE**  
FOR  
**THE SPACE OF FORTY YEARS.**

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A NEW EDITION,  
*With many Critical and Explanatory Notices ;*

**EDMUND BELLCHAMBERS.**

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**LONDON:**

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**1822.**

Hoc est  
Vivere bis, vitâ posse priore frui.—MARTIAL.

When years no more of active life remain,  
Tis youth renew'd to laugh them o'er again.

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William Oxberry, Printer, White-Hart-Yard.

TO

W. C. MACREADY, Esq.

SIR,

On the grounds of gratitude alone for your great public exertions to support the purity of the stage, I offer you the present volume, and though he who never needs indulgence may perhaps be unqualified to afford it, I feel assured that in accepting this slight tribute, your candour will protect what your judgment cannot sanction. Averse as you are to homage of this kind, I have consented, in part, to suppress it, and shall therefore select another opportunity of showing how congenial my sentiments are with that rigid criticism on your efforts, which is now nothing more than ardent admiration, and impartial praise.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your devoted servant,

EDMUND BELLCHAMBERS.

## P R E F A C E.

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He entertains us in the best leisure of our life ; that is, between meals, the most unfit time either for study or bodily exercise.

SIR THOMAS OVERBURY.

A work undertaken, like this “Apology,” in the professed gaiety of its author’s heart, is very clearly explained, and perhaps as powerfully defended. There is something agreeable, to my own feelings at least, in a hardy forgetfulness of public opinion, and if the books that are generally set before us, were written with a fair portion of the same spirit, if instead of attempting to catch the reader’s assent by studiously consulting his prejudices, they were to offer a manful and ingenuous abridgment of what the writers really thought, much service might be done to the reputation, and perhaps to the interests, of literature, by such a method of promoting our correspondence with the human mind.

It is curious that an exploit of this importance should originate with a person like Cibber, who seems to have led a long and not inconspicuous life, without distinguishing it by one act of talent or of probity, that was committed upon principle.

He lapsed, it is true, into several sensible things that still do honour to a depraved disposition, and it is one of those paradoxes which merely serve to amuse us, that with a wretched deference for every thing in the shape of rank, wealth, and power, he had not a particle of veneration for the virtue and ability, which encircled him. This eccentric man submitted to a slavish dependence upon the great, whom he knew most familiarly in their hours of idleness or disorder ; he was the Helot sometimes of their sport, and sometimes of their cruelty, and yet, with nothing to compensate for the outrage his pride was expected to endure, he not only continued to cultivate this pitiful intercourse, but even signalised himself in pursuing it, by the number, audacity, and offensiveness of his vices. I do not mean that Cibber had nothing nominally to console him against the harshness of his imputed treatment. Nominally he had much. He acquired a considerable share of that domestic celebrity called fashion, and was intitled, by diploma as it were, to be gazed at for the magnitude of his peruke, or the strangeness of his garments. Fashion, however, made him more than a coxcomb, for if the full severity of report may be trusted, he became, in the zenith of his notoriety, a drunkard, a fornicator, and an atheist. I am neither able nor willing to authenticate this character, but it may be remarked, that the fashionable world, like “ a strong ass couching



down between two burdens,"\* still maintains among us all its antient pretensions to folly and crime.

From this dreadful lethargy, Cibber was aroused by the exposure of a satirist, whose virulence proceeded from unfeigned animosity, and whose rebuke was corroborated, in part, by the publicity of those facts upon which it was founded. Cibber was no hypocrite in his turpitude, and for this openness of temper I sincerely esteem him. Not a plunge into the vortex of shame had been either clandestine or obscure, and Pope was thus enabled to exhibit him, in a striking point of view, with a pleasant consciousness that every trait of the picture would be recognised and applauded. Here the paradox begins, for it is really singular that Cibber should acknowledge the enormity of his vices,† and yet be stung by their celebration. It may, indeed, be urged that tenderness for his capacity, which Pope principally impeached, was more hurt, and more active, than anxiety for his moral character; but it still appears paradoxical, that a man, careless only where his chief interest is concerned, should laugh over

\* Genesis; 49, 14.

† "Cibber was in his nature incorrigible. He was endued with so little nice sensibility and moral delicacy, that, so far from blushing at the detection of vices and follies, the perfection of his abilities consisted in making them the instruments by which he attracted the notice of mankind."—Ruffhead's "Life of Pope."

the denial of his honesty, and be exasperated by a doubt of his understanding.

Pope, however, *nailed him up*, though not, as Warburton vigourously insinuates, by way of terrible example to other vermin, and Cibber was soon tempted to contest the justice of his condemnation. A genteel living writer, to whose minute research and impartial judgment the literary inquirer is much indebted, has discussed the conduct of this quarrel, with equal intelligence and temper\*, and his award furnishes, perhaps for the first time, a correct knowledge of Cibber's triumph over Pope's asperity. The dispute, however, has lost its interest, and Cibber, in spite of his happy retorts, must still go down the stream of time, with that inglorious reputation which the "Dunciad" has given him. In this case there is something to lament. The frivolity of Cibber was highly contemptible, and might have had an influence upon his posthumous character. Many anecdotes of his ignorance and impiety are scattered in various places,† and the work of Pope's malevolence has certainly been assisted by means that would have partially accomplished it. Talent is thus taught an ill lesson, and its tyrannical encroachments upon truth

\* In the "Quarrels of Authors."

† In, particularly, the novels of Fielding, and in Johnson's conversations.

are encouraged by a fresh instance of their easy success, and perpetual splendour.

Cibber, it is plain, has been rather libelled than satirised by his merciless antagonist, without squaring any part of the treatment he received to that most pernicious, profane, and detestable doctrine of modern law, that *truth* may have a libellous tendency. It was a solemn mockery of justice on the part of Pope, to gratify his rancour by holding up Cibber as a *dunce*, in the face of many acute and lively productions, among which Pope himself included part of his plays, and Swift, a more candid and competent observer, classed the present entertaining essay. The reputation of Cibber is no more to be rated by his sorry birth-day odes, than the merit of Pope is to be taken from his share of the vile farce in which he joined with Gay, as a covert contributor. Mankind, it is true, have a trick of adopting decisions in this ungenerous manner, but I never yet heard that the customs of mankind were to be embraced by those who shrink from their concurrence, and despise their authority. A fairer basis has been laid by Cibber's own hands for his genuine character than the invective of Pope presents to us, and upon those who *can* extricate themselves from the "snares, lines, angles, hooks, and nets," of an elegant calumniator, the following pages will work a powerful impression. I am not sanguine, however,

that a perusal of this volume *will* be advantageous to Cibber, because I know that the very last opinions we surrender through life, are those of excessive ill-nature, and flagrant injustice.

If the drama may be resembled to a great river, actors are like those little islands which the sand and mud throw up in the mouth of it. The stage has certainly been dignified at intervals by men deserving of much higher consideration, and the dear friend to whom this edition is dedicated, offers us "a living instance" of the lofty principle, the kind heart, the extensive knowledge, and the polished manners, with which it is sometimes endowed. But Cibber was not calculated to redeem his profession by such qualities as these, and inordinate vanity alone induced him to apologise for a life over which neither his notions nor his talents allowed him to affect the slightest superiority. He thought, as most actors think, that his occupation was one of even national consequence, and that few pursuits in the world could be compared with it, for lustre and advantage. "*Parva leves capiunt animos.*" To so fortunate a mistake we owe the spirit and freedom of those confessions that form the substance of the following book, and whenever the fraternity will oblige us with a similar effort, half so clever or so delightful, we can surely suffer them to be as vain and confident as they please.

It is the very egotism of Cibber which has rendered the historical part of his pages both valuable and amusing. Persuaded that the stores of his own personal experience were infinitely more precious than those that any foregoing writer had collected, he drew upon them with a lavish hand, and thus furnished much anecdote of a more original and appropriate nature than other stage historians have supplied. In the arts of compilation Cibber is not an adept. Whatever he offers is spun out of either his own knowledge or imagination, and to this auspicious departure from a sordid practice, we owe those admirable characters of cotemporary excellence, which, though,

Turn'd to the sun, they cast a thousand dyes,  
still constitute our safest guides to the theatrical truth of that period. The brilliant manner in which he has painted Betterton, his talents, and his popularity, is warmly attested, and though a careful gleaning of recorded facts may impart much reality to a portrait of this kind, nothing but the glow of personal inspection can render it at once faithful, elegant, animated, and expressive. Cibber's pencil, to use his own words, has superadded those touches of light, which give life and spirit to the whole, and Betterton's character, highly as we prize it, is only a specimen of

those connecting critical likenesses, with which the body of this volume is enriched.

By the task which Cibber prescribed to himself he is entitled to be tried; and though it has been found necessary to regulate some minor points of his narrative, to the justice of his general views very little can be added. He has delineated the stage, during his long intimacy with it, in a copious and impartial manner, and whatever earnestness he betrays in support of its primitive institution, is always coupled with a warm exposure of its contemptible management.—Nothing is more liable to corrupt and debase the public mind than licentious amusements, nor can I perceive any amusement to be more licentious, than a theatre administered by persons whose object is to make money of the power with which they are invested. Cibber saw this evil with a clear and honest eye, and some of the best passages in his “Apology” are those that were penned to correct it. Rope-dancers and wild beasts are not the natural aliment of a theatrical appetite, and it is in vain to asperse the multitude, by urging that such shameful expedients are resorted to solely for the sake of gratifying it. Whatever the public are accustomed to they will approve of, and if the theatres were fully protected in their patent rights, and com-

mitted to judicious hands, I am convinced that a course of rational entertainments would be as warmly patronised, as the monstrous absurdities by which they are superseded. The very kind reception of Mr. Knowles's "*Virginus*," a play remarkable for its unaffected beauty, corroborates this argument, and though the managers may assure us, with implicit truth, that their hopeful system of enormous receipts was not promoted by this drama, can they prove that the money really amassed by it would not be enough to support the theatre upon a just and eligible ground? It is to this question we must bring them, for it appears that the debauchery and extravagance of the stage is rendered necessary by nothing but a system of engaging innumerable performers, at vast salaries, who are elevated into unnatural superiority and affluence by the direct vitiation of the public taste. Cibber mentions as a proof of signal success, that the "*Provoked Husband*," on some particular evening, drew together a receipt of *one hundred and forty pounds*, and if we reflect that not more than *sixty* years ago the benefit charges were but as many guineas, it should surely startle us to see the present state of theatrical expenditure. The nightly cost to a manager is now nearly *two hundred pounds*, and unless something more than this immense amount is realised, he becomes a sufferer, of course, by

his gigantic speculation. In the time of Shakspeare, *twenty pounds* was a receipt of unusual magnitude, and yet the actors subsisted in comfort and respectability upon a proportionate stipend. Betterton's salary, long after, was only one hundred and twenty pounds *per annum*, and if ever an individual deserved wealth or consideration from the exercise of theatrical talent, it was this superlative performer.

I shall not continue to trace the precise steps by which theatrical income has attained its present inordinate amount, but it may be calmly remarked, that the riches of the stage have advanced invariably with its corruptions. The "charm" is now "so firm and good," that an eminent actor can accumulate a fortune in three or four years, even while the very persons who employ and enhance his abilities are impoverished and obscure. Our theatres royal have done this, by their boundless dimensions, and unexampled magnificence; and, unfortunately, in doing it, they have worked other mischief of a more desperate sort. The public mind lies in ruins at their feet, and though they have coupled this ruin with their own, what is to satisfy us for their fatal pollution of virtue and manners? . . .

Cibber expounds a remedy for all this, in the eleventh chapter of the present volume, by laying down the very excellent principle, that govern-



ments should protect what they tolerate. He argues that a well-established stage must conduce to the just spirit of the people, by dispersing among them those precepts and sentiments upon which their religion and their liberty are founded; and chimerical as his notions may be termed by those who swelter in the venom that they propagate, I will assert that such an organisation of the stage is far from impracticable. Let the "powers that be" abstract it from the hands of needy adventurers, and it will no longer excite the malediction of those who spontaneously abhor what is vile and contemptible; but "if," as Cibber says, "for the support of the stage, what is generally shown there must be lowered to the taste of common spectators, by low and senseless jollity, in which the understanding can have no share; whenever such is the state of the stage, it will be as often liable to unanswerable censure, and manifest disgraces."

The experience of Cibber will be found valuable by those friends of the drama, who have time to consult it, many pages of his book being occupied with remarks upon the best means of rendering plays at once dignified and useful. I can add nothing to the force and clearness of his reasons why our theatre should maintain a national interest, because I sincerely think, while regulated by a proper tenderness for those who fre-

quent it, that no public amusement can pretend to more particular regard. The very general esteem in which the "Apology" has been long held, by those even who took many exceptions to the talent and conduct of the author, is a sufficient pledge of its rare merit, and I can freely add my own settled opinion, that the English language does not possess a finer specimen of frank and cordial vivacity. My own pursuits, at an earlier period, lay more among those things of which Cibber treats, than perhaps they ought to have done, and such was the enjoyment I then anticipated from a perusal of this book, that for many years after it came into my hands, though eagerly sought for, I abstained from reading it, not caring to realise a pleasure that I felt conscious could never again be afforded me. Few of our lighter anxieties are so acute or so agreeable, as those that result from intense attention to the theatre, and whenever a right spirit prevails of investigating what attracts us, this "Apology" will be cherished by the class it appeals to, as an indispensable companion. It was thought necessary by the booksellers that some notes should be attached to the present edition, for the purpose of elucidating various points that Cibber had not thoroughly handled, and with what success so correct a wish has been fulfilled, the reader must determine. I have done my best, for

many weeks together, with the subject, and though the credit of this task will never keep pace with its labour, I can say, from the pleasure that clung about me while it was executed, as poor Bunyan said on a more serious occasion, "They are golden hours in which such things happen to me."

THE EDITOR.

TO A

## CERTAIN GENTLEMAN.\*

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SIR,

BECAUSE I know it would give you less concern, to find your name in an impertinent satire, than before the daintiest dedication of a modern author, I conceal it. \*

Let me talk never so idly to you, this way, you are, at least, under no necessity of taking it to yourself: nor when I boast of your favours, need you blush to have bestowed them. Or I may now give you all the attributes that raise a wise and good-natured man to esteem and happiness, and not be censured, as a flatterer, by my own, or your enemies. I place my own first; because, as they are the greater number, I am afraid of not paying the greater respect to them. Yours, if such there are, I imagine are too well-bred to declare themselves: but as there is no hazard, or visible terror, in an attack upon my defenceless station, my censurers have generally been persons of an intrepid sincerity. Having therefore shut the door against them, while I am

\* Presumed to be the Right Honourable Mr. Pelham, whose death, in March, 1754, Garrick celebrated by an ode.

*thus privately addressing you, I have little to apprehend from either of them.*

Under this shelter; then, I may safely tell you, that the greatest encouragement I have had to publish this work, has risen from the several hours of patience you have lent me, at the reading it. It is true, I took the advantage of your leisure, in the country, where moderate matters serve for amusement; and there, indeed, how far your good-nature for an old acquaintance, or your reluctance to put the vanity of an author out of countenance, may have carried you, I cannot be sure; and yet appearances give me stronger hopes: for was not the complaisance of a whole evening's attention, as much as an author of more importance ought to have expected? Why then was I desired, the next day, to give you a second lecture? Or why was I kept a third day, with you, to tell you more of the same story? If these circumstances have made me vain, shall I say, sir, you are accountable for them? No, sir, I will rather so far flatter myself, as to suppose it possible, that your having been a lover of the stage, (and one of those few good judges, who know the use and value of it, under a right regulation) might incline you to think so copious an account of it a less tedious amusement, than it may naturally be to others of different good sense, who may have less concern, or taste, for it. But be all this as it may, the brat is now born, and

rather than see it starve, upon the bare parish provision, I chuse, thus clandestinely, to drop it at your door, that it may exercise one of your many virtues, your charity, in supporting it.

If the world were to know into whose hands I have thrown it, their regard to its patron might incline them to treat it as one of his family : but in the consciousness of what *I* am, I chuse not, sir, to say who *you* are. If your equal, in rank, were to do public justice to your character, then, indeed, the concealment of your name might be an unnecessary diffidence : but am I, sir, of consequence enough, in any guise, to do honour to Mr.—— ? Were I to set him in the most laudable lights, that truth and good-sense could give him, or his own likeness would require ; my officious mite would be lost in that general esteem and regard, which people of the first consequence, even of different parties, have a pleasure in paying him. Encomiums to superiors, from authors of lower life, as they are naturally liable to suspicion, can add very little lustre to what before was visible to the public eye : such offerings (to use the style they are generally dressed in) like pagan incense, evaporate on the altar, and rather gratify the priest, than the deity.

But you, sir, are to be approached in terms within the reach of common sense ; the honest oblation of a cheerful heart is as much as you

## DEDICATION

Desire, or I am able to bring you : a heart, that has just sense enough to mix respect with intimacy, and is never more delighted than when your rural hours of leisure admit me, with all my laughing spirits, to be my idle self, and in the whole day's possession of you. Then, indeed, I have reason to be vain ; I am, then, distinguished by a pleasure too great to be concealed, and could almost pity the man of graver merit, that dares not receive it with the same unguarded transport. This nakedness of temper the world may place in what rank of folly or weakness they please ; but, till wisdom can give me something that will make me more heartily happy, I am content to be gazed at as I am, without lessening my respect for those whose passions may be more soberly covered.

Yet, sir, will I not deceive you. 'Tis not the lustre of your public merit, the affluence of your fortune, your high figure in life, nor those honourable distinctions, which you had rather deserve than be told of, that have so many years made my plain heart hang after you. These are but incidental ornaments, that, 'tis true, may be of service to you in the world's opinion ; and though, as one among the crowd, I may rejoice that Providence has so deservedly bestowed them ; yet my particular attachment has risen from a more natural, and more engaging charm,

—the agreeable companion. Nor is my vanity half so much gratified in the *honour*, as my sense is in the *delight* of your society. When I see you lay aside the advantages of superiority, and, by your own cheerfulness of spirits, call out all that nature has given me to meet them; then 'tis I taste you;—then life runs high;—I desire—I possess you!

Yet, sir, in this distinguished happiness, I give not up my farther share of that pleasure, or of that right, I have to look upon you with the public eye, and to join in the general regard so unanimously payed to that uncommon virtue, your integrity. This, sir, the world allows so conspicuous a part of your character, that, however invidious the merit, neither the rude license of detraction, nor the prejudice of party, has ever once thrown on it the least impeachment or reproach. This is that commanding power, that, in public speaking, makes you heard with such attention. This it is, that discourages, and keeps silent the insinuations of prejudice and suspicion; and almost renders your eloquence an unnecessary aid to your assertions: even your opponents, conscious of your integrity, hear you rather as a witness, than an orator. But this, sir, is drawing you too near the light; integrity is too particular a virtue to be covered with a



a general application. Let me therefore only talk to you, as at Tusculum, (for so I will call that sweet retreat, which your own hands have raised) where, like the famed orator of old, when public cares permit, you pass so many rational, unbending hours. There, and at such times, to have been admitted, still plays on my memory, more like a fictitious than a real enjoyment. How many golden evenings, in that theatrical paradise of watered lawns, and hanging groves, have I walked, and prated down the sun, in social happiness! Whether the retreat of Cicero, in cost, magnificence, or curious luxury of antiquities, might not out-blaze the *simplex munditiis*, the modest ornaments of your villa, is not within my reading to determine. But that the united power of nature, art, or elegance of taste, could have thrown so many varied objects into a more delightful harmony, is beyond my conception.

When I consider you, in this view, and as the gentleman of eminence, surrounded with the general benevolence of mankind, I rejoice, sir, for you, and for myself; to see *you* in this particular light of merit, and myself sometimes admitted to my more than equal share of you.

If this apology for my past life discourages you not from holding me in your usual favour, let

me quit this greater stage, the world, whenever  
I may, I shall think this the best acted part of  
any I have undertaken, since you first conde-  
scended to laugh with,

Sir,

Your most obedient,

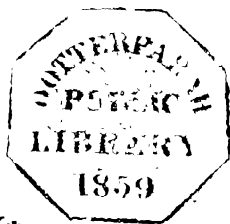
Most obliged, and

Most humble servant,

COLLEY CIBBER.

November 6, 1739.





AN  
**A P O L O G Y\***  
FOR THE  
**LIFE OF MR. COLLEY CIBBER.**

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**CHAP. I.**

*The Introduction.—The author's birth.—Various fortune at school.—Not liked by those he loved there.—Why.—A digression upon raillery.—The use and abuse of it.—The comforts of folly—Vanity of greatness.—Laughing no bad philosophy.*

YOU know, sir, I have often told you that, one time or other, I should give the public some memoirs of my own life ; at which you have never failed to laugh, like a friend, without saying a word to dissuade me from it ; concluding, I suppose, that such a wild thought could not possibly require a serious answer. But you see I was in earnest. And now you will say the world will find me, under my own hand, a weaker man than perhaps I may have passed for, even among my enemies. With all my heart : my enemies will then read me with pleasure, and you, perhaps, with envy, when you find that follies, without the reproach of guilt upon them, are not inconsistent with happiness. But why make my follies public ? Why not ? I have passed my time very pleasantly with them, and I don't recollect that they have ever been hurtful to any other man living.

\* This apology was written at Bath.

Even admitting they were injudiciously chosen, would it not be vanity in me to take shame to myself for not being found a wise man? Really, sir, my appetites were in too much haste to be happy, to throw away my time in pursuit of a name I was sure I could never arrive at.

Now the follies I frankly confess I look upon as, in some measure, discharged; while those I conceal are still keeping the account open between me and my conscience. To me the fatigue of being upon a continual guard to hide them, is more than the reputation of being without them can repay. If this be weakness, *defendit numerus*; I have such comfortable numbers on my side, that were all men to blush that are not wise, I am afraid, in ten, nine parts of the world ought to be out of countenance: but since that sort of modesty is what they don't care to come into, why should I be afraid of being stared at, for not being particular? Or if the particularity lies in owning my weakness, will my wisest reader be so inhuman as not to pardon it? But if there should be such a one, let me, at least, beg him to show me that strange man who is perfect. Is any one more unhappy, more ridiculous, than he who is always labouring to be thought so, or that is impatient when he is not thought so? Having brought myself to be easy under whatever the world may say of my undertaking, you may still ask me why I give myself all this trouble? Is it for fame or profit\* to myself, or use or delight to others? For all these considerations I have neither fondness nor indifference: if I obtain none of them, the amusement, at worst, will be a reward that must constantly go along with the labour. But behind all this, there is something inwardly inciting, which I cannot express in few words: I must therefore a little make bold with your patience.

\* However indifferent Mr. Cibber might have felt or fancied himself to the "profit" of this publication, it netted £1,500. which he took with avidity.

A man who has passed above forty years of his life upon a theatre, where he has never appeared to be himself, may have naturally excited the curiosity of his spectators to know what he really was, when in nobody's shape but his own; and whether he, who by his profession had so long been ridiculing his benefactors, might not, when the coat of his profession was off, deserve to be laughed at himself: or from his being often seen in the most flagrant and immoral characters, whether he might not see as great a rogue when he looked into the glass himself, as when he held it to others.

It was, doubtless, from a supposition that this sort of curiosity would compensate their labours, that so many hasty writers have been encouraged to publish the lives\* of the late Mrs. Oldfield, Mr. Wilks, and Mr. Booth, in less time

\* These compilations were catchpenny attempts upon the purses of those who wanted discretion to anticipate their fallacy. Our modern biographers of departed eminence pursue a safer track, and instead of depending upon hasty episodes for extemporary matter, collect the materials of a posthumous narrative, while its hero is living to assist their researches.

Mr. Cibber might have instanced the "Life of Congreve," as a shining example of this injurious celerity. When Curl, whom Dr. Arbuthnot denominated one of the new terrors of death, from his constantly printing the "Memoirs" of every eminent individual, announced the publication alluded to, Mrs. Bracegirdle interested herself so far in the departed author's reputation, as to solicit a sight of the manuscript. This was refused. She then asked, upon what authority the book had been compiled, and what pieces contained in it were genuine? Upon being told there would be several of his essays, letters, &c., she answered, "Not a single sheet of paper, I dare say, that Congreve ever saw." And in this she was prophetically right, as far as the new matter extended, though it must be owned that various articles were incorporated with the volume which had been repeatedly printed before.

after their deaths than one could suppose it cost to transcribe them.

Now, sir, when my time comes, lest they should think it worth while to handle my memory with the same freedom, I am willing to prevent its being so oddly besmeared, or at best, but flatly white-washed, by taking upon me to give the public this, as true a picture of myself as natural vanity will permit me to draw: for to promise you that I shall never be vain, were a promise that, like a looking-glass too large, might break itself in the making: nor am I sure I ought wholly to avoid that imputation, because if vanity be one of my natural features, the portrait would not be like me without it. In a word, I may palliate and soften as much as I please; but, upon an honest examination of my heart, I am afraid the same vanity which makes even homely people employ painters to preserve a flattering record of their persons, has seduced me to print off this *chiaro 'scuro* of my mind.

And, when I have done it, you may reasonably ask me of what importance can the history of my private life be to the public? To this, indeed, I can only make you a ludicrous answer; which is, that the public very well knows my life has not been a private one; that I have been employed in their service, ever since many of their grandfathers were young men; and, though I have voluntarily laid down my post, they have a sort of right to inquire into my conduct, for which they have so well paid me, and to call for the account of it, during my share of administration in the state of the theatre. This work, therefore, which I hope they will not expect a man of hasty head should confine to any regular method—for I shall make no scruple of leaving my history, when I think a digression may make it lighter for my reader's digestion—this work, I say, shall not only contain the various impressions of my mind, as in Louis the Fourteenth's

cabinet you have seen the growing medals of his person from infancy to old age, but shall likewise include with them the “Theatrical History of my Own Time,” from my first appearance on the stage to my last exit. If, then, what I shall advance on that head may any ways contribute to the prosperity or improvement of the stage in being, the public must of consequence have a share in its utility.

This, sir, is the best apology I can make for being my own biographer. Give me leave therefore to open the first scene of my life, from the very day I came into it; and though, considering my profession, I have no reason to be ashamed of my original, yet, I am afraid, a plain dry account of it will scarcely admit of a better excuse than what my brother Bays makes for *Prince Prettyman* in the “Rehearsal;” \* *viz.* “I only do it, for fear I should be thought to be nobody’s son at all;” for if I have led a worthless life, the weight of my pedigree will not add an ounce to my intrinsic value. But be the inference what it will, the simple truth is this.

I was born in London, on the 6th of November, 1671, in Southampton-street, facing Southampton House. My father, Caius Gabriel Cibber, was a native of Holstein, who came into England some time before the restoration of King Charles the Second, to follow his profession, which was that of a statuary, &c. The basso relievo on the pedestal of the great column in the city, and the two figures of the lunatics, the raving and the melancholy, over the gates of Bethlehem

\* *Bays.* There’s a blustering verse for you now!

*Smith.* Yes, sir; but why is he so mightily troubled to find he is not a fisherman’s son?

*Bays.* Po! that is not because he had a mind to be his son, but for fear he should be thought to be nobody’s son at all.—“Rehearsal,” act III.



Hospital,\* are no ill monuments of his fame as an artist. My mother was the daughter of William Colley, Esq., of a very antient family of Glaiston in Rutlandshire, where she was born. My mother's brother, Edward Colley, Esq., who gave me my Christian name, being the last heir-male of it, the family is now extinct. I shall only add, that in Wright's "History of Rutlandshire," published in 1684, the Colleys are recorded as Sheriffs and Members of Parliament, from the reign of Henry the Seventh, to the latter end of Charles the First, in whose cause, chiefly, Sir Antony Colley, my mother's grandfather, sunk his estate from three thousand to about three hundred per annum.

In the year 1682, at little more than ten years of age, I was sent to the free school of Grantham in Lincolnshire, where I staid till I got through it, from the lowest form to the uppermost. And such learning as that school could give me is the most I pretend to, which, though I have not utterly forgotten, I cannot say I have much improved by study; but even there, I remember. I was the same inconsistent creature I have been ever since: always in full spirits, in some small capacity to do right, but in a more frequent alacrity to do wrong, and consequently often under a worse character than I wholly deserved. A giddy negligence always possessed me, and so much, that I remember I was once whipped for my theme, though my master told me at the same time, that what was good of it was better than any boy's in the form. And, whatever shame it may be to own it, I have observed the same odd fate has frequently attended the course of my later conduct in life. The unskillful openness, or, in plain terms, the indiscretion I have always acted with from my youth, has drawn more ill-will towards me than men of worse morals and more wit might have met with. My ignorance

\* Removed to the new hospital in St. George's Fields.

and want of jealousy of mankind have been so strong, that it is with reluctance I even yet believe any person I am acquainted with can be capable of envy, malice, or ingratitude; and to show you what a mortification it was to me, in my very boyish days, to find myself mistaken, give me leave to tell you a school-story.

A great boy, nearly the head taller than myself, in some wrangle at play had insulted me; upon which I was foolhardy enough to give him a box on the ear; the blow was soon returned with another that brought me under him, and at his mercy. Another lad, whom I really loved, and thought a good-natured one, cried out, with some warmth, to my antagonist, while I was down, "Beat him, beat him soundly." This so amazed me, that I lost all my spirits to resist, and burst into tears. When the fray was over, I took my friend aside, and asked him how he came to be so earnestly against me? To which, with some glouting confusion, he replied, "Because you are always jeering, and making a jest of me to every boy in the school." Many a mischief have I brought upon myself by the same folly in riper life. Whatever reason I had to reproach my companion's declaring against me, I had none to wonder at it, while I was so often hurting him: thus I deserved his enmity by my not having sense enough to know I *had* hurt him; and he hated me, because he had not sense enough to know that I never *intended* to hurt him.

As this is the first remarkable error of my life I can recollect, I cannot pass it by without throwing out some further reflections upon it; whether flat or spirited, new or common, false or true, right or wrong, they will be still my own, and consequently like me; I will therefore boldly go on, for I am only obliged to give you my *own* and not a *good* picture: to show as well the weakness as the strength of my understanding. It is not on what I write, but on my reader's

curiosity I rely to be read through ; at worst though the impartial may be tired, the ill-natured, no small number, I know will see the bottom of me.

What I observed, then, upon my having undesignedly provoked my school-friend into an enemy, is a common case in society ; errors of this kind often sour the blood of acquaintance into an inconceivable aversion, where it is little suspected. It is not enough to say of your raillery that you intended no offence ; if the person you offer it to has either a wrong head, or wants a capacity to make that distinction, it may have the same effect as the intention of the grossest injury : and, in reality, if you know his parts are too slow to return it in kind, it is a vain and idle inhumanity, and sometimes draws the aggressor into difficulties not easily got out of. Or, to give the case more scope, suppose your friend may have a passive indulgence for your mirth ; if you find him silent at it, though you were as intrepid as *Cæsar*, there can be no excuse for your not leaving it off. When you are conscious that your antagonist can give as well as take, then, indeed, the smarter the hit the more agreeable the parry : a man of cheerful sense, among friends, will never be grave upon an attack of this kind, but rather thank you that you have given him a right to be even with you. There are few men, though they may be masters of both, that, on such occasions, had not rather show their parts than their courage, and the preference is just ; a bull-dog may have one, and only a man can have the other. Thus it happens that in the coarse merriment of common people, when the jest begins to swell into earnest, for want of this election, you may observe, he that has least wit generally gives the first blow. Now, as among the better sort, a readiness of wit is not always a sign of intrinsic merit, so the want of that readiness is no reproach to a man of plain sense and civility, who, therefore, methinks, should never have these

lengths of liberty taken with him. Wit there becomes absurd, if not insolent; ill-natured I am sure it is, which imputation a generous spirit will always avoid, for the same reason that a man of real honour will never send a challenge to a cripple. The inward wounds that are given by the inconsiderate insults of wit, to those that want it, are as dangerous as those given by oppression to inferiors; as long in healing, and perhaps never forgiven. There is besides (and little worse than this) a mutual grossness in raillery, that sometimes is more painful to the hearers than to the persons engaged. I have seen a couple of these clumsy combatants drub one another with as little manners or mercy as if they had two flails in their hands; children at play with case-knives could not give you more apprehension of their doing one another a mischief; and yet, when the contest has been over, the boobies have looked round them for approbation, and upon being told they were admirably well matched, have sat down bedaubed as they were, contented at making it a drawn battle. After all that I have said, there is no clearer way of giving rules for raillery, than by example.

There are two persons now living, who though very different in their manner, are, as far as my judgment reaches, complete masters of it; one of a more polite and extensive imagination, the other of a knowledge more closely useful to the business of life. The one gives you perpetual pleasure, and seems always to be taking it; the other seems to take none till his business is over, and then gives you as much as if pleasure were his only business. The one enjoys his fortune, the other thinks it first necessary to make it; though that he will enjoy it then I cannot be positive, because when a man has once picked up more than he wants, he is apt to think it a weakness to suppose he has enough. But as I don't remember ever to have seen these gentlemen in

the same company, you must give me leave to take them separately.

The first of them,\* then, has a title, and —— no matter what: I am not to speak of the great, but the happy part of his character, and in this one single light; not of his being an illustrious, but a delightful companion.

In conversation he is seldom silent but when he is attentive, nor ever speaks without exciting the attention of others; and though no man might with less displeasure to his hearers engross the talk of the company, he has a patience in his vivacity that chuses to divide it, and rather gives more freedom than he takes, his sharpest replies having a mixture of politeness that few have the command of. His expression is easy, short, and clear; a stiff or studied word never comes from him; it is in a simplicity of style that he gives the highest surprise, and his ideas are always adapted to the capacity and taste of the person he speaks to. Perhaps you will understand me better if I give you a particular instance of it. A person at the university, who, from being a man of wit, easily became his acquaintance there, from that acquaintance found no difficulty in being made one of his chaplains: this person afterwards leading a life that did no great honour to his cloth, obliged his patron to take some gentle notice of it; but as his patron knew the patient was squeamish, he was induced to sweeten the medicine to his taste; and, therefore, with a smile of good humour, told him, that if to the many vices he had already, he would give himself the trouble to add one more, he did not doubt but his reputation might still be set up again. Sir Crape, who could have no aversion to so pleasant a dose, desiring to know what it might be, was answered, “Hypocrisy, Doctor; only a little hypocrisy.” This plain reply can need no comment; but, “*ex pede Herculem*,” he is every where proportionable.

\* The Earl of Chesterfield.

I think I have heard him since say the Doctor thought hypocrisy so detestable a sin that he died without committing it. In a word, this gentleman gives spirit to society the moment he comes into it, and whenever he leaves it, they who have business have then leisure to go about it.

Having often had the honour to be myself the butt of his raillery, I must own I have received more pleasure from his lively manner of raising the laugh against me, than I could have felt from the smoothest flattery of a serious civility. Though wit flows from him with as much ease as common sense from another, he is so little elated with the advantage he may have over you, that, whenever your good fortune gives it against him, he seems more pleased with it on your side than his own. The only advantage he makes of his superiority of rank is that, by always waiving it himself, his inferior finds he is under the greater obligation not to forget it.

When the conduct of social wit is under such regulations, how delightful must those convivia, those meals of conversation, be, where such a member presides, who can with so much ease, as Shakspeare phrases it, "set the table in a roar." I am in no pain that these imperfect outlines will be applied to the person I mean, because everyone who has the happiness to know him, must know how much more in this particular attitude is wanting to be like him.

The other gentleman,\* whose bare interjections of laughter have humour in them, is so far from having a title, that he has lost his real name, which some years ago he suffered his friends to rally him out of, in lieu of which they have equipped him with one they thought had a better sound in good company. He is the first man, of so sociable a spirit, that I ever knew capable of quitting the allurements of wit and pleasure, for a strong application to business; in his youth, for there was a time when he was young, he set out

\* Was this Bubb Doddington?

in all the hey-day expenses of a modish man of fortune ; but finding himself over-weighted with appetites, he grew restiff, kicked up in the middle of the course, and turned his back upon his frolics abroad, to think of improving his estate at home ; in order to which he clapped collars upon his coach-horses, and that their mettle might not run over other people, he tied a plough to their tails, which, though it might give them a more slovenly air, would enable him to keep them fatter in a foot-pace, with a whistling peasant beside them, than in a full trot, with a hot-headed coachman behind them. In these unpolite amusements he has laughed like a rake, and looked about him like a farmer for many years. As his rank and station often find him in the best company, his easy humour, whenever he is called to it, can still make himself the fiddle of it.

And though some say he looks upon the follies of the world like too severe a philosopher, yet he rather chuses to laugh than to grieve at them ; to pass his time, therefore, more easily in it, he often endeavours to conceal himself by assuming the air and taste of a man of fashion ; so that his only uneasiness seems to be that he cannot quite prevail with his friends to think him a worse manager than he really is ; for they carry their raillery to such a height, that it sometimes rises to a charge of downright avarice against him ; upon which head it is no easy matter to be more merry upon him than he will be upon himself. Thus, while he sets that infirmity in a pleasant light, he so disarms your prejudice that, if he has it not, you can't find in your heart to wish he were without it. Whenever he is attacked where he seems to lie so open, if his wit happens not to be ready for you, he receives you with an assenting laugh, till he has gained time to whet it sharp enough for a reply, which seldom turns out to his disadvantage. If you are too strong for him, which may possibly happen from his being obliged

\* to defend the weak side of the question, his last resource is to join in the laugh, till he has got himself off by an ironical applause of your superiority.

If I were capable of envy, what I have observed of this gentleman, would certainly incline me to it ; for, surely, to get through the necessary cares of life, with a train of pleasures at our heels in vain calling after us ; to give a constant preference to the business of the day, and yet be able to laugh while we are about it ; to make even society the subservient reward of it, is a state of happiness which the gravest precepts of moral wisdom will not easily teach us to exceed. When I speak of happiness, I go no higher than that which is contained in the world we now tread upon ; and when I speak of laughter, I don't simply mean that which every oaf is capable of, but that which has its sensible motive and proper season, which is not more limited than recommended by that indulgent philosophy,

Cum ratione insanire.

When I look into my present self, and afterwards cast my eye round all my hopes, I don't see any one pursuit of them that should so reasonably rouse me out of a nod in my great chair, as a call to those agreeable parties\* I have sometimes

\* It was in one of these " agreeable parties" that Mr. Garrick asked him if he had not, in his possession, a comedy or two of his own writing.—" What then ?" said Cibber. " I should be happy to have the honour," replied Garrick, " of bringing it into the world." " Who have you to act it ?"—" Why, there are Clive, Pritchard, myself, and some others."—" No," said the old man, taking a pinch of snuff with great non-chalance, " it won't do."

Foote often declared that Cibber would allow no higher merit to Garrick, than that of acting *Fribble* ; and in a meeting at Sir Francis Delaval's, this assertion was partially verified. The conversation happening to turn upon past actors, and their peculiar



the happiness to mix with, where I always assert the equal liberty of leaving them, when my spirits have done their best with them.

*Now, sir, as I have been making my way for above forty years through a crowd of cares, all which, by the favour of Providence, I have honestly got rid of, is it a time of day for me to leave off these fooleries, and to set up a new character? Can it be worth my while to waste my spirits, to bask my blood, with serious contemplations, and perhaps impair my health in the fruitless study of advancing myself into the better opinion of those very, very few wise men that are as old as I am? No, the part I have acted in real life, shall be all of a piece:*

— *Servetur ad inum,*

*Qualis ab incepto processerit.*

I will not go out of my character, by straining to be wiser than I can be, or by being more affectedly pensive than I need be; whatever I am men of sense will know me to be, put on what disguise I will; I can no more put off my follies than my skin; I have often tried, but they stick too close to me; nor am I sure my friends are displeased with them; for, besides that in this light I afford them frequent matter of mirth, they may possibly be less uneasy at their own foibles, when they have so old a precedent to keep them in countenance. Nay, there are some frank enough to confess they envy what they laugh at; and when I have seen others, whose rank and fortune have laid a sort of restraint upon their liberty of pleasing their company by

method of playing, Garrick observed, that the old style was banished from the stage, and even if revived, would stand but little chance of success. "How do you know that?" said Cibber: "you never tried it." (1)

pleasing themselves, I have said softly to myself—"Well, there is some advantage in having neither rank nor fortune!" *Not but there are among them a third sort, who have the particular happiness of unbending into the very wantonness of good-humour, without depreciating their dignity: he that is not master of that freedom, let his condition be never so exalted, must still want something to come up to the happiness of his inferiors who enjoy it.* If Socrates could take pleasure in playing at "Even or Odd" with his children, or Agesilaus divert himself in riding the hobby-horse with them, am I obliged to be as eminent as either of them before I am as frolicsome? If the Emperor Adrian, near his death, could play with his very soul, his "animula," &c., and regret that it could be no longer companionable; if greatness, at the same time, was not the delight he was so loth to part with, surely then these cheerful amusements I am contending for, must have no inconsiderable share in our happiness. He that does not chuse to live his own way suffers others to chuse for him. Give me the joy I always took in the end of an old song,—

My mind, my mind is a kingdom to me!

If I can please myself with my own follies, have not I a plentiful provision for life? If the world thinks me a trifler, I don't desire to break in upon their wisdom; let them call me any fool but an uncheerful one; I live as I write; while my way amuses me it is as well as I wish it: when another writes better I can like him too, though he should not like me. Not our great imitator of Horace himself can have more pleasure in writing his verses than I have in reading them, though I sometimes find myself there, as Shakspeare terms it, "dispraisingly" spoken of. If

\* Pope.

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he is a little free with me, I am generally in good company, for he is as blunt with my betters; so that even here I might laugh in my turn. My superiors, perhaps, may be mended by him; but, for my part, I own myself incorrigible; I look upon my follies as the best part of my fortune, and am more concerned to be a good husband of them, than of that; nor do I believe I shall ever be rhymed out of them. And, if I don't mistake, I am supported in my way of thinking by Horace himself, who, in excuse of a loose writer, says,

*Prætulerim scriptor delirus, inersque videri,  
Dum mea delectent, mala me, aut denique fallant,  
Quam sapere, et ringi——*

which, to speak of myself as a loose philosopher, I have thus ventured to imitate :

Me, while my laughing follies can deceive,  
Blest in the dear delirium let me live,  
Rather than wisely know my wants and grieve.

We had once a merry monarch\* of our own, who thought cheerfulness so valuable a blessing, that he would have quitted one of his kingdoms where he could not enjoy it; where, among many other conditions they had tied him to, his sober subjects would not suffer him to laugh on a Sunday; and, though this might not be the avowed cause of his elopement, I am not sure, had he had no other, that this alone might not have served his turn; at least he has my hearty approbation either way; for, had I been under the same restriction, though my staying were to have made me his successor, I should rather have chosen to follow him.

How far his subjects might be in the right, is not my

\* Charles the Second.

affair to determine ; perhaps they were wiser than the frogs in the fable, and rather chose to have a log than a stork for their king ; yet I hope it will be no offence to say, that King Log himself must have made but a very simple figure in history.

The man who chuses never to laugh, or whose becalmed passions know no motion, seems to me only in the quiet state of a green tree ; he vegetates, 'tis true, but shall we say he lives ? Now, sir, for amusement.—Reader, take heed ; for I find a strong impulse to talk impertinently ; if, therefore, you are not as fond of seeing as I am of showing myself in all my lights, you may turn over two leaves together, and leave what follows to those who have more curiosity, and less to do with their time, than you have.—As I was saying, then, let us, for amusement, advance this or any other prince to the most glorious throne, mark out his empire in what clime you please, fix him on the highest pinnacle of unbounded power, and in that state let us inquire into his degree of happiness ; make him at once the terror and the envy of his neighbours ; send his ambition out to war, and gratify it with extended fame and victories ; bring him in triumph home, with great unhappy captives behind him, through the acclamations of his people, to repossess his realms in peace. Well, when the dust has been brushed from his purple, what will he do next ? Why, this envied monarch, whom we will allow to have a more exalted mind than to be delighted with the trifling flatteries of a congratulating circle, will chuse to retire, I presume, to enjoy in private the contemplation of his glory ; an amusement, you will say, that well becomes his station. But there, in that pleasing rumination, when he has made up his new account of happiness, how much, pray, will be added to the balance more than as it stood before his last expedition ? From what one article will the improvement

of it appear? Will it arise from the conscious pride of having done his weaker enemy an injury? Are his eyes so dazzled with false glory, that he thinks it a less crime in him to break into the palace of his princely neighbour, because he gave him time to defend it, than for a subject feloniously to plunder the house of a private man? Or is the outrage of hunger and necessity more enormous than the ravage of ambition? Let us even suppose the wicked usage of the world, as to that point, may keep his conscience quiet; still, what is he to do with the infinite spoil that his imperial rapine has brought home? Is he to sit down, and vainly deck himself with the jewels which he has plundered from the crown of another, whom self-defence had compelled to oppose him? No, let us not debase his glory into so low a weakness. What appetite, then, are these shining treasures food for? Is their vast value in seeing his vulgar subjects stare at them, wise men smile at them, or his children play with them? Or can the new extent of his dominions add a cubit to his happiness? Was not his empire wide enough before to do good in? And can it add to his delight that now no monarch has such room to do mischief in? But, farther: if even the great Augustus, to whose reign such praises are given, could not enjoy his days of peace free from the terrors of repeated conspiracies, which lost him more quiet to suppress than his ambition cost him to provoke them, what human eminence is secure? In what private cabinet, then, must this wondrous monarch lock up his happiness, that common eyes are never to behold it? Is it, like his person, a prisoner to its own superiority? Or does he at last poorly place it in the triumph of his injurious devastations? One moment's search into himself will plainly show him that real and reasonable happiness can have no existence without innocence and liberty. What a mockery is greatness without

them ! How lonesome must be the life of that monarch who, while he governs only by being feared, is restrained from letting down his grandeur sometimes to forget himself, and to humanise him into the benevolence and joy of society ; to throw off his cumbersome robe of majesty to be a man without disguise ; to have a sensible taste of life in its simplicity, till he confess, from the sweet experience that “ *dulce est desipere in loco* ” was no fool’s philosophy. Or if the gaudy charms of pre-eminence are so strong that they leave him no sense of a less pompous though a more rational enjoyment, none sure can envy him, but those who are the dupes of an equally fantastic ambition.

My imagination is quite heated and fatigued in dressing up this phantom of felicity ; but I hope it has not made me so far misunderstood, as not to have allowed that in all the dispensations of Providence the exercise of a great and virtuous mind is the most elevated state of happiness : no, sir, I am not for setting up gaiety against wisdom ; nor for preferring the man of pleasure to the philosopher ; but for showing that the wisest or greatest man is very near an unhappy man, if the unbending amusements I am contending for, are not sometimes admitted to relieve him.

How far I may have over-rated these amusements let graver casuists decide ; whether they affirm or reject what I have asserted hurts not my purpose, which is not to give laws to others, but to show by what laws I govern myself. If I am misguided, ’tis nature’s fault, and I follow her from this persuasion, that as nature has distinguished our species from the mute creation by our risibility, her design must have been, by that faculty, as evidently to raise our happiness, as by our *os sublime*, our erected faces, to lift the dignity of our form above them.

Notwithstanding all I have said, I am afraid there is an absolute power in what is simply called our constitution

that will never admit of other rules for happiness than her own ; from which (be we never so wise or weak) without divine assistance we only can receive it ; so that all this my parade and grimace of philosophy has been only making a mighty merit of following my own inclination. A very natural vanity, though it is some sort of satisfaction to know it does not impose upon me. Vanity again ! However, think it what you will that has drawn me into this copious digression, 'tis now high time to drop it : I shall, therefore, in my next chapter, return to my school, from whence, I fear, I have too long been a truant.

## CHAP. II.

*He that writes of himself, not easily tired.—Boys may give men lessons.—The author's preferment at school; attended with misfortunes.—The danger of merit among equals.—Of satirists and backbiters.—What effect they have had upon the author.—Stanzas published by himself, against himself.*

IT often makes me smile to think how contentedly I have set myself down to write my own life ; nay, and with less concern for what may be said of it, than I should feel were I to do the same for a deceased acquaintance. This you will easily account for, when you consider that nothing gives a coxcomb more delight, than when you suffer him to talk of himself ; which sweet liberty I here enjoy for a whole volume together ; a privilege which neither could be allowed me, nor would become me to take, in the company I am generally admitted to ; but here, when I have all the talk to myself, and have nobody to interrupt or contradict me, surely to say whatever I have a mind other people should know of me, is a pleasure which none but authors as vain as myself can conceive.—But to my history.

However little worth notice the life of a school-boy may be supposed to contain, yet, as the passions of men and children have much the same motives, and differ very little in their effects, unless where the elder experience may be able to conceal them ; as, therefore, what arises from the boy may possibly be a lesson to the man, I shall venture to relate a fact or two, that happened while I was still at school.

In February, 1684-5, died King Charles the Second, who



being the only king I had ever seen, I remember, young as I was, his death made a strong impression upon me, as it drew tears from the eyes of multitudes who looked no further into him than I did: but it was, then, a sort of school-doctrine to regard our monarch as a deity; as, in the former reign, it was to insist he was accountable to this world as well as to that above him. But what, perhaps, gave King Charles the Second, this peculiar possession of so many hearts, was his affable and easy manner in conversing; which is a quality that goes farther with the greater part of mankind than many higher virtues, which, in a prince, might more immediately regard the public prosperity. Even his indolent amusement of playing with his dogs, and feeding his ducks, in St. James's Park, which I have seen him do, made the common people adore him, and, consequently, overlook in him what in a prince of a different temper they might have been out of humour at.

I cannot help remembering one more particular in those times, though it be quite foreign to what will follow. I was carried by my father to the chapel in Whitehall; where I saw the king and his royal brother, the then Duke of York, with him in the closet, and present during the whole divine service. Such dispensation, it seems, for his interest, had that unhappy prince from his real religion, to assist at another, to which his heart was so utterly averse.—I now proceed to the facts I promised to speak of.

King Charles's death was judged, by our school-master, a proper subject to lead the form I was in into a higher kind of exercise; he therefore enjoined us, severally, to make his funeral oration: this sort of task, so entirely new to us all, the boys received with astonishment, as a work above their capacity; and though the master persisted in his command, they one and all, except myself, resolved to decline it. But I, sir, who was ever giddily forward, and thought-

less of consequences, set myself roundly to work, and got through it as well as I could. I remember to this hour that single topic of his affability, which made me mention it before, was the chief motive that warmed me into the undertaking; and to show how very childish a notion I had of his character at that time, I raised his humanity and love of those who served him to such a height, that I imputed his death to the shock he received from the Lord Arlington's being at the point of death about a week before him. This oration, such as it was, I produced the next morning: all the other boys pleaded their inability, which the master, taking rather as a mark of their modesty than their idleness, only seemed to punish, by setting me at the head of the form: a preferment dearly bought. Much happier had I been to have sunk my performance in the general modesty of declining it. A most uncomfortable life I led among them, for many a day after! I was so jeered, laughed at, and hated as a pragmatistical bastard, (school-boys' language) who had betrayed the whole form, that scarce any of them would keep me company; and though it so far advanced me into the master's favour, that he would often take me from the school to give me an airing with him on horseback, while they were left to their lessons, you may be sure such envied happiness did not increase their good-will to me; notwithstanding which, my stupidity could take no warning from their treatment. An accident of the same nature happened soon after, that might have frightened a boy of a meek spirit from attempting any thing above the lowest capacity. On the 23d of April following, being the coronation-day of the new king, the school petitioned the master for leave to play; to which he agreed, provided any of the boys would produce an English ode upon that occasion. The very word ode, I know, makes you smile already; and so it does me; not only because it still makes so many poor devils turn

wits upon it, but from a more agreeable motive; from a reflection of how little I then thought that, half a century afterwards, I should be called upon twice a year, by my post, to make the same kind of oblations to an unexceptionable prince, the serene happiness of whose reign my halting rhymes are still so unequal to. This, I own, is vanity without disguise; but, "*Hæc olim meminisse juvat*:" the remembrance of the miserable prospect we had then before us, and have since escaped by a revolution, is now a pleasure, which, without that remembrance, I could not so heartily have enjoyed. The ode I was speaking of fell to my lot, which, in about half an hour, I produced. I cannot say it was much above the merry style of "Sing, sing the day, and sing the song," in the farce; yet, bad as it was, it served to get the school a play-day, and to make me not a little vain upon it; which last effect so disgusted my play-fellows, that they left me out of the party I had most a mind to be of, in that day's recreation. But their ingratitude served only to increase my vanity; for I considered them as so many beaten tits, that had just had the mortification of seeing my hack of a Pegasus come in before them. This low passion is so rooted in our nature, that sometimes ripper heads cannot govern it. I have met with much the same silly sort of coldness, even from my contemporaries of the theatre, from having the superfluous capacity of writing myself the characters I have acted.

Here, perhaps, I may again seem to be vain; but if all these facts are true, as true they are, how can I help it? Why am I obliged to conceal them? The merit of the best of them is not so extraordinary as to have warned me to be nice upon it; and the praise due to them is so small a fish, it was scarce worth while to throw my line into the water for it. If I confess my vanity, while a boy, can it be vanity, when a man, to remember it? And if I have a

tolerable feature, will not that as much belong to my picture as an imperfection? In a word, from what I have mentioned I would observe only this: that when we are conscious of the least comparative merit in ourselves, we should take as much care to conceal the value we set upon it, as if it were a real defect: to be elated or vain upon it, is showing your money before people in want; ten to one but some who may think you have too much may borrow, or pick your pocket before you get home. He who assumes praise to himself the world will think overpays himself. Even the suspicion of being vain ought as much to be dreaded as the guilt itself. Cæsar was of the same opinion, in regard to his wife's chastity. Praise, though it may be our due, is not like a bank-bill, to be paid upon demand; to be valuable, it must be voluntary. When we are dunned for it, we have a right and privilege to refuse it. If compulsion insists upon it, it can only be paid as persecution in points of faith is, in a counterfeit coin: and who ever believed occasional conformity to be sincere? Nero, the most vain coxcomb of a tyrant that ever breathed, could not raise an unfeigned applause of his harp by military execution; even where praise is deserved, ill-nature and self-conceit, passions that poll a majority of mankind, will, with less reluctance, part with their money than their approbation. Men of the greatest merit are forced to stay till they die, before the world will fairly make up their account: then, indeed, you have a chance for your full due, because it is less grudged when you are incapable of enjoying it: then, perhaps, even malice shall heap praises upon your memory; though not for your sake, but that your surviving competitors may suffer by a comparison. It is from the same principle that satire shall have a thousand readers, where panegyric has one. When I therefore find my name at length in the satirical works of our most celebrated living

author,\* I never look upon those lines as malice meant to me, (for he knows I never provoked it,) but profit to himself: one of his points must be to have many readers: he considers that my face and name are more known than those of many thousands of more consequence in the kingdom; that, therefore, right or wrong, a “Lick at the Laureat”† will always be a sure bait, *ad captandum vulgus*,—to catch him little readers: and that to gratify the unlearned, by now and then interspersing those merry sacrifices of an old acquaintance to their taste, is a piece of quite right poetical craft.

But as a little bad poetry is the greatest crime he lays to my charge, I am willing to subscribe to his opinion of it. That this sort of wit is one of the easiest ways, too, of pleasing the generality of readers, is evident from the comfortable subsistence which our weekly retailers of politics have been known to pick up, merely by making bold with a government that had unfortunately neglected to find their genius a better employment.

Hence, too, arises all that flat poverty of censure and invective that so often has a run in our public papers, upon the success of a new author; when, God knows, there is seldom above one writer among hundreds in being at the same time, whose satire a man of common sense ought to be moved at. When a master in the art is angry, then, indeed, we ought to be alarmed. How terrible a weapon is satire in the hand of a great genius! Yet, even there, how liable is prejudice to misuse it! How far, when general, it may reform our morals, or what cruelties it may inflict by being angrily particular,‡ is perhaps above my reach to determine.

\* Pope.

† This is the title of a pamphlet in which some of Mr. Cibber’s peculiarities have been severely handled.

‡ ———“every dunce of a reader knows he means—*angry with a particular person*.”—“Champion,” April 29, 1740.

I shall, therefore, only beg leave to interpose what I feel for others whom it may personally have fallen upon. When I read those mortifying lines of our most eminent author, in his character of Atticus,\* (Atticus, whose genius in verse, and whose morality in prose, has been so justly admired,) though I am charmed with the poetry, my imagination is hurt at the severity of it: and though I allow the satirist to have had personal provocation, yet, methinks, for that very reason, he ought not to have troubled the public with it: for, as it is observed in the 242d “Tattler,” “In all terms of reproof, when the sentence appears to arise from personal hatred or passion, it is not then made the cause of mankind, but a misunderstanding between two persons.” But if such kind of satire has its incontestible greatness; if its exemplary brightness may not mislead inferior wits into a barbarous imitation of its severity, then I have only admired the verses, and exposed myself, by bringing them under so scrupulous a reflection: but the pain which the acrimony of those verses gave me is, in some measure, allayed, in finding that this inimitable writer, as he advances in years, has since had candour enough to celebrate the same person for his visible merit. Happy genius, whose verse, like the eye of beauty, can heal the deepest wounds with the least glance of favour!

Since I am got so far into this subject, you must give me leave to go through all I have a mind to say upon it; because I am not sure that, in a more proper place, my memory may be so full of it. I cannot find, therefore, from what reason satire is allowed more license than comedy, or why either of them, to be admired, ought not to be limited by decency and justice. Let Juvenal and Aristophanes have

\* Addison, to whom this character was privately sent by Pope, its exasperated writer.

taken what liberties they please, if the learned have nothing more than their antiquity to justify their laying about them at that enormous rate, I shall wish they had a better excuse for them. The personal ridicule and scurrility thrown upon Socrates, which Plutarch too condemns, and the boldness of Juvenal, in writing real names over guilty characters, I cannot think are to be pleaded in right of our modern liberties of the same kind. *Facit indignatio versum* may be a very spirited expression, and seems to give a reader hopes of a lively entertainment; but I am afraid reproof is in unequal hands when anger is its executioner; and though an outrageous invective may carry some truth in it, yet it will never have that natural, easy credit with us, which we give to the laughing ironies of a cool head. The satire that can smile “circum præcordia ludit,” and seldom fails to bring the reader quite over to his side; whenever ridicule and folly are at variance; but when a person satirised is used with the extremest rigour, he may sometimes meet with compassion instead of contempt, and throw back the odium that was designed for him, upon the author. When I would, therefore, disarm the satirist of this indignation, I mean little more than that I would take from him all private or personal prejudice, and would still leave him as much general vice to scourge as he pleases, and that with as much fire and spirit as art and nature demand, to enliven his work, and keep his reader awake.

Against all this it may be objected, that these are laws which none but phlegmatic writers will observe, and only men of eminence should give. I grant it, and therefore only submit them to writers of better judgment. I pretend not to restrain others from chusing what I don't like; they are welcome, if they please, too, to think I offer these rules more from an incapacity to break them, than from a moral humanity. Let it be so still: that will not weaken the strength of

what I have asserted, if my assertion be true. And though I allow that provocation is not apt to weigh out its resentments by drachms and scruples, I shall still think that no public revenge can be honourable, where it is not limited by justice ; and if honour is insatiable in its revenge, it loses what it contends for, and sinks itself, if not into cruelty, at least, into vain-glory.

This so singular concern which I have shown for others, may naturally lead you to ask me what I feel for myself, when I am unfavourably treated by the elaborate authors of our daily papers. Shall I be sincere, and own my frailty ? Its usual effect is to make me vain ; for I consider, if I were quite good for nothing, these piddlers in wit would not be concerned to take me to pieces, or (not to be quite so vain) when they moderately charge me with only ignorance or dulness, I see nothing in that which an honest man need be ashamed of.\* There is many a good soul, who, from those sweet slumbers of the brain, are never awakened by the least harmful thought : and I am sometimes tempted to think those retailers of wit may be of the same class ; that what they write proceeds not from malice, but industry ; and that I ought no more to reproach them, than I would a lawyer that pleads against me for his fee ; that their detraction, like dung thrown upon a meadow, though it may seem at first to deform the prospect, in a little time it will disappear of itself, and leave an involuntary crop of praise behind it.†

\* When Cibber was charged with moral offences of a deeper dye, he thought himself at liberty, I presume, to relinquish his indifference, and bring the libeller to account. On a future page will be found the public advertisement in which he offered a reward of ten pounds for the detection of Dennis.

† There are instances, however, in which detraction has rather lain “like lumps of marl upon a barren moor, encumbering what they cannot fertilise.”—Sheridan’s “Critic.”



When they confine themselves to a sober criticism upon what I write, if their censure is just, what answer can I make to it? If it is unjust, why should I suppose that a sensible reader will not see it, as well as myself? Or, admit I were able to expose them, by a laughing reply, will not that reply beget a rejoinder? And though they might be gainers, by having the worst on't, in a paper war, that is no temptation for me to come into it. Or (to make both sides less considerable) would not my bearing ill-language, from a chimney-sweeper, do me less harm, than it would be to box with him, though I were sure to beat him? Nor indeed is the little reputation I have as an author, worth the trouble of a defence. Then, as no criticism can possibly make me worse than I really am, so nothing I can say of myself can possibly make me better; when therefore a determined critic comes armed with wit and outrage, to take from me that small pittance I have, I would no more dispute with him, than I would resist a gentleman of the road, to save a little pocket-money. Men that are in want themselves, seldom make a conscience of taking it from others. Whoever thinks I have too much, is welcome to what share of it he pleases; nay, to make him more merciful, (as I partly guess the worst he can say of what I now write) I will prevent even the imputation of his doing me injustice, and honestly say it myself; *viz.* That of all the assurances I was ever guilty of, this, of writing my own life is the most hardy,—I beg his pardon,—impudent is what I should have said; that through every page there runs a vein of vanity and impertinence, which no Frenchman's "Memoirs" ever came up to; but, as this is a common error, I presume the terms of doating trifle, old fool, or conceited coxcomb, will carry contempt enough for an impartial censor to bestow on me; that my style is unequal, pert, and frothy, patched and party-coloured, like the coat of an harlequin; low and pompous,

crammed with epithets, strewed with scraps of second-hand Latin from common quotations ; frequently aiming at wit, without ever hitting the mark ; a mere ragout, tossed up from the offals of other authors : my subject below all pens but my own, which, whenever I keep to, is flatly daubed by one eternal egotism ; that I want nothing but wit to be as an accomplished a coxcomb here, as ever I attempted to expose on the theatre ; nay, that this very confession is no more a sign of my modesty, than it is a proof of my judgment ; that, in short, you may roundly tell me, that——  
 “ Cinna (or Cibber) vult videri pauper, et est pauper.”

When humble Cinna cries, “ I’m poor and low,”

You may beleve him—he is really so.

Well, Sir Critic ! and what of all this ? Now I have laid myself at your feet, what will you do with me ? Expose me ? Why, dear sir, does not every man that writes expose himself ? Can you make me more ridiculous than nature has made me ? You could not surely suppose, that I would lose the pleasure of writing, because you might possibly judge me a blockhead, or perhaps might pleasantly tell other people they ought to think me so, too. Will not they judge as well from what I say, as what you say ? If then you attack me merely to divert yourself, your excuse for writing will be no better than mine. But perhaps you may want bread : if that be the case, even go to dinner, in God’s name !

If our best authors, when teased by these triflers, have not been masters of this indifference, I should not wonder if it were disbelieved in me ; but when it is considered that I have allowed my never having been disturbed into a reply has proceeded as much from vanity as from philosophy, the matter then may not seem so incredible : and though I confess, the complete revenge of making them immortal dunces in immortal verse, might be glorious, yet, if you will call

it insensibility in me, never to have winced at them, even that insensibility has its happiness ; and what could glory give me more ? For my part, I have always had the comfort to think, whenever they designed me a disfavour, it generally flew back into their own faces, as it happens to children when they squirt at their play-fellows against the wind. If a scribbler cannot be easy, because he fancies I have too good an opinion of my own productions, let him write on, and mortify ; I owe him not the charity to be out of temper myself, merely to keep him quiet, or give him joy : nor, in reality, can I see, why any thing misrepresented, though believed of me by persons to whom I am unknown, ought to give me any more concern, than what may be thought of me in Lapland : 'tis with those with whom I am to live only, where my character can affect me ; and I will venture to say, he must find out a new way of writing, that will make me pass my time there less agreeably.

You see, sir, how hard it is for a man that is talking of himself, to know when to give over ; but if you are tired, lay me aside till you have a fresh appetite ; if not, I'll tell you a story.

In the year 1730, there were many authors, whose merit wanted nothing but interest to recommend them to the vacant laurel, and who took it ill, to see it at last conferred upon a comedian ; insonmuch, that they were resolved, at least, to shew specimens of their superior pretensions, and accordingly enlivened the public papers with ingenious epigrams, and satirical flirts, at the unworthy successor : these papers, my friends, with a wicked smile, would often put into my hands, and desire me to read them fairly in company : this was a challenge which I never declined, and, to do my doughty antagonists justice, I always read them with as much impartial spirit, as if I had written them myself. While I was thus beset on all sides, there happened

to step forth a poetical knight-errant to my assistance, who was hardly enough to publish some compassionate stanzas in my favour. These, you may be sure, the raillery of my friends could do no less than say, I had written to myself. To deny it, I knew, would but have confirmed their pretended suspicion : I therefore told them, since it gave them such joy to believe them my own, I would do my best to make the whole town think so, too. As the oddness of this reply was, I knew, what would not be easily comprehended, I desired them to have a day's patience, and I would print an explanation to it : to conclude, in two days after I sent this letter, with some doggerel rhymes at the bottom.

To the Author of the *Whitehall Evening Post*.

SIR,

The verses to the laureat, in yours of Saturday last, have occasioned the following reply, which I hope you'll give a place in your next, to show that we can be quick as well as smart, upon a proper occasion : and, as I think it the lowest mark of a scoundrel to make bold with any man's character in print, without subscribing the true name of the author ; I therefore desire, if the laureat is concerned enough to ask the question, that you will tell him my name, and where I live : till then, I beg leave to be known by no other than that of,

Your servant,

Monday, Jan. 11, 1730.

FRANCIS FAIRPLAY.

These were the verses.

Ha, ha ! Sir Coll, is that thy way,

Thy own dull praise to write ?

And would'st thou stand so sure a lay ?

No, that's too stale a bite.

Nature and art in thee combine,

Thy talents here excel :

All shining brass thou dost outshine,

To play the cheat so well.

cies repetita placeret :'' so delicious a morsel could not be served up too often. After it had held them nine times told for a jest, the public has been pestered with a tenth skull, thick enough to repeat it. Nay, the very learned in the law, have at last facetiously laid hold of it. Ten years after it first came from me, it served to enliven the eloquence of an eminent pleader before a House of Parliament ! What author would not envy me so frolicsome a fault, that had such public honours paid to it ?

After this consciousness of my real defects, you will easily judge, sir, how little I presume that my poetical labours may outlive those of my mortal cotemporaries.

At the same time that I am so humble in my pretensions to fame, I would not be thought to undervalue it ; nature will not suffer us to despise it, but she may sometimes make us too fond of it. I have known more than one good writer, very nearly ridiculous, from being in too much heat about it. Whoever intrinsically deserves it, will always have a proportionable right to it. It can neither be resigned, nor taken from you by violence. Truth, which is unalterable, must (however his fame may be contested) give every man his due : what a poem weighs, it will be worth ; nor is it in the power of human eloquence, with favour or prejudice, to increase or diminish its value. Prejudice, 'tis true, may a while discolour it ; but it will always have its appeal to the equity of good sense, which will never fail, in the end, to reverse all false judgment against it. Therefore, when I see an eminent author hurt, and impatient at an impotent attack upon his labours, he disturbs my inclination to admire him ; I grow doubtful of the favourable judgment I have made of him, and am quite uneasy to see him so tender, in a point he cannot but know he ought not himself to be judge of ; his concern, indeed, at another's prejudice, or disapprobation, may be natural ; but, to own it, seems to me a natural weak-

ness. When a work is apparently great, it will go without crutches ; all your heart and anxiety, to heighten the fame of it, then becomes low and little. He that will bear no censure, must be often robbed of his due praise. Fools have as good a right to be readers, as men of sense have, and why not to give their judgments, too ? Methinks it would be a sort of tyranny in wit, for an author to be publicly putting every argument to death that appeared against him ; so absolute a demand for approbation, puts us upon our right to dispute it ; praise is as much the reader's property, as wit is the author's ; applause is not a tax paid to him as a prince, but rather a benevolence given to him as a beggar ;\* and we have naturally more charity for the dumb beggar, than the sturdy one. The merit of a writer, and a fine woman's face, are never mended by their talking of them : how amiable is she that seems not to know she is handsome !

To conclude ; all I have said upon this subject is much better contained in six lines of a reverend author,† which will be an answer to all critical censure for ever.

Time is the judge ; time has nor friend nor foe ;  
False fame will wither, and the true will grow.  
Arm'd with this truth, all critics I defy,  
For, if I fall, by my own pen I die,  
While snarlers strive, with proud but fruitless pain,  
To wound immortals, or to slay the slain.

\* This is an assertion in which we cannot coincide, because if even Mr. Cibber's statement be correct, that *wit is an author's property*, the public in accepting it, are bound to return him an adequate compensation. Will any man maintain that praise is *gratuitously* bestowed upon the finer passages of Shakspeare, without any reference to their equitable demands, as rich flights of sublimity, or rare specimens of humour ?

† Dr. Young.

## CHAP. III.

*The author's several chances for the church, the court, and the army.—Going to the university, met the revolution at Nottingham.—Took arms on that side.—What he saw of it.—A few political thoughts.—Fortune willing to do for him.—His neglect of her.—The stage preferred to all her favours.—The profession of an actor considered.—The misfortunes and advantages of it.*

I AM now come to that crisis of my life, when Fortune seemed to be at a loss what she should do with me. Had she favoured my father's first designation of me, he might then, perhaps, have had as sanguine hopes of my being a bishop, as I afterwards conceived of my being a general, when I first took arms, at the revolution. Nay, after that, I had a third chance, too, equally as good, of becoming an under-propper of the state. How, at last, I came to be none of all these, the sequel will inform you.

About the year 1687, I was taken from school to stand at the election of children into Winchester College; and being, by my mother's side, a descendant of William of Wykeham, the founder, my father, who knew little how the world was to be dealt with, imagined my having that advantage, would be security enough for my success, and so sent me simply down thither, without the least favourable recommendation or interest, but that of my naked merit, and a pompous pedigree in my pocket. Had he tacked a direction to my back, and sent me by the carrier to the mayor of the town.

to be chosen member of parliament there, I might have had just as much chance to have succeeded in the one, as the other. But I must not omit in this place, to let you know, that the experience which my father then bought, at my cost, taught him, some years after, to take a more judicious care of my younger brother, Lewis Cibber, whom, with the present of a statue of the founder, of his own making, he recommended to the same college. This statue now stands (I think) over the school-door there, and was so well executed, that it seemed to speak—for its kinsman. It was no sooner set up, than the door of preferment was open to him.

Here, one would think, my brother had the advantage of me, in the favour of fortune, by this his first laudable step into the world. I own, I was so proud of his success, that I even valued myself upon it: and yet it is but a melancholy reflection, to observe how unequally his profession and mine were provided for; when I, who had been the outcast of fortune, could find means, from my income of the theatre, before I was my own master there, to supply, in his highest preferment, his common necessities. I cannot part with his memory without telling you, I had as sincere a concern for this brother's well-being, as my own. He had lively parts, and more than ordinary learning, with a good deal of natural wit and humour; but from too great a disregard to his health, he died a fellow of New College, in Oxford, soon after he had been ordained by Dr. Compton, then Bishop of London. I now return to the state of my own affair at Winchester.

After the election, the moment I was informed that I was one of the unsuccessful candidates, I blest myself to think what a happy reprieve I had got, from the confined life of a school-boy, and the same day took post back to London, that I might arrive time enough to see a play (then my dar-



ling delight) before my mother might demand an account of my travelling charges. When I look back to that time, it almost makes me tremble to think what miseries, in fifty years farther in life, such an unthinking head was liable to. To ask, why Providence afterwards took more care of me than I did of myself, might be making too bold an inquiry into its secret will and pleasure: all I can say to that, point is, that I am thankful, and amazed at it.\*

'Twas about this time I first imbibed an inclination, which I durst not reveal, for the stage; for, besides that I knew it would disoblige my father, I had no conception of any means, practicable, to make my way to it. I therefore suppressed the bewitching ideas of so sublime a station, and compounded with my ambition by laying a lower scheme, of only getting the nearest way into the immediate life of a gentleman collegiate. My father being at this time employed at Chatsworth, in Derbyshire, by the (then) Earl of Devonshire, who was raising that seat from a Gothic, to a Grecian magnificence, I made use of the leisure I then had, in London, to open to him, by letter, my disinclination to wait another year for an uncertain preferment at Winchester, and to entreat him that he would send me, per saltum, by a short cut, to the university. My father, who was

\* There is a levity in this sentence, which accords with the charges so often brought against Cibber of impiety and irreligion. Dennis, in a "Letter to Sir John Edgar," *alias* Sir Richard Steele, accuses him of spitting upon a picture of our Saviour, at Bath, and Dr. Johnson informed Davies, (1) that Cibber having once entered into conversation, at Tunbridge, with the famous Mr. Whiston, on purpose to insult him, that gentleman cut the matter short by declining to discourse with him, he being a clergyman, and his antagonist, as he told him, not only a player, but, as he had heard, a pimp.

(1) Dramatic Miscellanies.

naturally indulgent to me, seemed to comply with my request, and wrote word, that as soon as his affairs would permit, he would carry me with him, and settle me in some college, but rather at Cambridge, where, during his late residence at that place, in making some statues that now stand upon Trinity College new library, he had contracted some acquaintance with the heads of houses, who might assist his intentions for me. This I liked better than to go discountenanced to Oxford, to which it would have been a sort of reproach to me, not to have come elected. After some months were elapsed, my father not being willing to let me lie too long idling in London, sent for me down to Chatsworth, to be under his eye, till he could be at leisure to carry me to Cambridge. Before I could set out, on my journey thither, the nation fell in labour of the revolution, the news being then just brought to London, that the Prince of Orange, at the head of an army, was landed in the west. When I came to Nottingham, I found my father in arms there, among those forces which the Earl of Devonshire had raised for the redress of our violated laws and liberties. My father judged this a proper season, for a young stripling to turn himself loose into the bustle of the world ; and being himself too advanced in years, to endure the winter fatigue, which might possibly follow, entreated that noble lord, that he would be pleased to accept of his son in his room, and that he would give him (my father) leave to return, and finish his works at Chatsworth. This was so well received by his lordship, that he not only admitted of my service, but promised my father, in return, that when affairs were settled, he would provide for me. Upon this, my father returned to Derbyshire, while I, not a little transported, jumped into his saddle. Thus, in one day, all my thoughts of the University were smothered in ambition ! A slight commission for a horse officer, was the least view I had

before me. At this crisis, you cannot but observe that the fate of King James and of the Prince of Orange, and that of so minute a being as myself, were all at once upon the anvil. In what shape they would severally come out, though a good guess might be made, was not then demonstrable to the deepest foresight; but as my fortune seemed to be of small importance to the public, Providence thought fit to postpone it, till that of those great rulers of nations was justly perfected. Yet, had my father's business permitted him to have carried me, one month sooner, as he intended, to the University, who knows but, by this time, that purer fountain might have washed my imperfections into a capacity of writing, instead of plays and annual odes, sermons, and pastoral letters. But whatever care of the church might so have fallen to my share, as I dare say it may be now, in better hands, I ought not to repine at my being otherwise disposed of.

You must, now, consider me as one among those desperate thousands, who, after a patience sorely tried, took arms under the banner of necessity, the natural parent of all human laws and government. I question, if in all the histories of empire, there is one instance of so bloodless a revolution, as that in England in 1688, wherein whigs, tories, princes, prelates, nobles, clergy, common people, and a standing army, were unanimous. To have seen all England of one mind, is to have lived at a very particular juncture. Happy nation! who are never divided among themselves, but when they have least to complain of. Our greatest grievance since that time, seems to have been, that we cannot all govern; and till the number of good places are equal to those who think themselves qualified for them, there must ever be a cause of contention among us. While great men want great posts, the nation will never want real or seeming patriots; and while great posts are filled with

persons whose capacities are but human, such persons will never be allowed to be without errors. Not even the revolution, with all its advantages, it seems, has been able to furnish us with unexceptionable statesmen, for, from that time, I don't remember any one set of ministers, that have not been heartily railed at; a period long enough, one would think, if all of them have been as bad as they have been called, to make a people despair of ever seeing a good one. But as it is possible that envy, prejudice, or party, may sometimes have a share in what is generally thrown upon them, it is not easy for a private man to know who is absolutely in the right, from what is said against them, or from what their friends or dependants may say in their favour; though I can hardly forbear thinking, that they who have been longest railed at, must, from that circumstance, show, in some sort, a proof of capacity.—But to my history.

It were almost incredible to tell you, at the latter end of King James's time, though the rod of arbitrary power was always shaking over us, with what freedom and contempt the common people, in the open streets, talked of his wild measures to make a whole protestant nation papists; and yet, in the height of our secure and wanton defiance of him, we, of the vulgar, had no further notion of any remedy for this evil, than a satisfied presumption that our numbers were too great to be mastered by his mere will and pleasure; that though he might be too hard for our laws, he would never be able to get the better of our nature; and that to drive all England into popery and slavery, he would find would be teaching an old lion to dance.\*

\* His favourite simile is a lion. Thus, [4to.] page 39, we have a "satisfied presumption, that \*\*\* to drive all England into

But, happy was it for the nation, that it had then wiser heads in it, who knew how to lead a people so disposed into measures for the public preservation.

Here, I cannot help reflecting on the very different deliverances England met with, at this time, and in the very same year of the century before: then, (in 1588) under a glorious princess, who had at heart the good and happiness of her people, we scattered and destroyed the most formidable navy of invaders that ever covered the seas: and now, (in 1688) under a prince who had alienated the hearts of his people, by his absolute measures to oppress them, a foreign power is received with open arms, in defence of our laws, liberties, and religion, which our native prince had invaded. How widely different were these two monarchs in their sentiments of glory! But, *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*.\*

When we consider in what height of the nation's prosperity the successor of Queen Elizabeth came to this throne, it seems amazing that such a pile of English fame and glory, which her skillful administration had erected, should, in every following reign, down to the Revolution,

popery and slavery, \*\*\*\* would be teaching an old lion to dance." At page 104, this "new race of critics seem \*\*\*\* like the lion-whelps in the Tower," &c. besides a third allusion to the same animal; and this brings into my mind a story which I once heard from Booth, that our biographer had, in one of his plays, in a local simile, introduced this generous beast in some island or country where lions did not grow; of which being informed by the learned Booth, the biographer replied, "Pr'ythee, tell me, then, where there is a lion; for, Gad's curse, if there be a lion in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, I will not lose my simile."—"Champion," May 6, 1740.

\* Vide note on page 43.

so unhappily moulder away in one continual gradation of political errors : all which must have been avoided, if the plain rule, which that wise princess left behind her, had been observed, *viz.*—That the love of her people was the surest support of her throne. This was the principle by which she so happily governed herself, and those she had the care of. In this she found strength to combat and struggle through more difficulties and dangerous conspiracies, than ever English monarch had to cope with. At the same time that she professed to desire the people's love, she took care that her actions should deserve it, without the least abatement of her prerogative ; the terror of which she so artfully covered, that she sometimes seemed to flatter those she was determined should obey. If the four following princes had exercised their regal authority with so visible a regard to the public welfare, it were hard to know whether the people of England might have ever complained of them, or even felt the want of that liberty they now so happily enjoy. 'Tis true, that before her time, our ancestors had many successful contests with their sovereigns for their antient right and claim to it ; yet what did those successes amount to ? Little more than a declaration, that there was such a right in being ; but who ever saw it enjoyed ? Did not the actions of almost every succeeding reign show, there were still so many doors of oppression left open to the prerogative, that, whatever value our most eloquent legislators may have set upon those antient liberties, I doubt it will be difficult to fix the period of their having a real being, before the Revolution. Or, if there ever was an elder period of our unmolested enjoying them, I own my poor judgment is at a loss where to place it. I will boldly say, then, it is to the Revolution only, we owe the full possession of what, till then, we never had more than a perpetually contested right to :

And, from thence, from the Revolution, it is that the protestant successors of King William have found their paternal care and maintenance of that right has been the surest basis of their glory.

These, sir, are a few of my political notions, which I have ventured to expose, that you may see what sort of an English subject I am ; how wise, or weak, they may have shown me, is not my concern ; let the weight of these matters have drawn me never so far out of my depth, I still flatter myself that I have kept a simple, honest head above water. And it is a solid comfort to me, to consider that how insignificant soever my life was at the Revolution, it had still the good fortune to make one, among the many, who brought it about ; and that I now, with my coevals, as well as with the millions since born, enjoy the happy effects of it.

But I must now let you see how my particular fortune went forward, with this change in the government : of which I shall not pretend to give you any farther account than what my simple eyes saw of it.

We had not been many days at Nottingham, before we heard, that the Prince of Denmark, with some other great persons, were gone off, from the King, to the Prince of Orange, and that the Princess Ann, fearing the king her father's resentment might fall upon her, for her consort's revolt, had withdrawn herself, in the night, from London, and was then within half a day's journey of Nottingham ; on which very morning we were suddenly alarmed with the news, that two thousand of the king's dragoons were in close pursuit to bring her back prisoner to London. But this alarm, it seems, was all stratagem, and was but a part of that general terror which was thrown into many other places about the kingdom, at the same time, with design to animate and unite the people in their common defence ;

it being then given out, that the Irish were every where at our heels, to cut off all the protestants within the reach of their fury. In this alarm our troops scrambled to arms, in as much order as their consternation would admit of, when having advanced some few miles on the London road, they met the princess in a coach, attended only by the Lady Churchill, (now Duchess Dowager of Marlborough) and the Lady Fitzharding, whom they conducted into Nottingham, through the acclamations of the people. The same night all the noblemen, and the other persons of distinction, then in arms, had the honor to sup at her Royal Highness's table, which was then furnished (as all her necessary accommodations were) by the care, and at the charge of the Lord Devonshire. At this entertainment, of which I was a spectator, something very particular surprised me. The noble guests at the table happening to be more in number, than attendants, out of liveries, could be found for, I being well known in the Lord Devonshire's family, was desired by his lordship's Maitre d'Hotel to assist at it. The post assigned me was to observe what the Lady Churchill might call for. Being so near the table, you may naturally ask me, what I might have heard to have passed in conversation at it, which I should certainly tell you, had I attended to above two words that were uttered there, and those were, "Some wine and water." These, I remember, came distinguished, and observed to my ear, because they came from the fair guest, whom I took such pleasure to wait on. Except at that single sound, all my senses were collected into my eyes, which during the whole entertainment wanted no better amusement, than of stealing now and then the delight of gazing on the fair object so near me. If so clear an emanation of beauty, such a commanding grace of aspect, struck me into a regard that had something softer than the most profound respect in it,



I cannot see why I may not, without offence, remember it ; since beauty, like the sun, must sometimes lose its power to chuse, and shine\* into equal warmth, the peasant and the courtier. Now to give you, sir, a farther proof of how good a taste my first hopeful entrance into manhood set out with, I remember above twenty years after, when the same lady had given the world four of the loveliest daughters that ever were gazed on, even after they were all nobly married, and were become the reigning toasts of every party of pleasure, their still lovely mother had at the same time her votaries, and her health very often took the lead, in those involuntary triumphs of beauty. However presumptuous or impertinent these thoughts might have appeared at my first entertaining them, why may I not hope that my having kept them decently secret, for full fifty years, may be now a good round plea for their pardon ? Were I now qualified to say more of this celebrated lady, I should conclude it thus :—that she has has lived, to all appearance, a peculiar favourite of Providence ; that few examples can parallel the profusion of blessings which have attended so long a life of felicity. A person so attractive ; a husband so memorably great ; an offspring so beautiful ; a fortune so immense ; and a title, which, when royal favour had no higher to bestow, she only could receive from the author of nature, a great grandmother without grey hairs ! These are such consummate indulgencies, that we might think Heaven has center'd them all in one person, to let us see how far, with a lively understanding, the full possession of them could contribute to human happiness. I now return to our military affairs.

\* Though *shine* has here been most ungrammatically made a verb active, it is impossible to understand our author's meaning, with even that licentious assistance.

From Nottingham our troops marched to Oxford; through every town we passed, the people came out, in some sort of order, with such rural, and rusty weapons as they had, to meet us, in acclamations of welcome, and good wishes. This, I thought, promised a favourable end of our civil war, when the nation seemed so willing to be all of a side. At Oxford, the Prince and Princess of Denmark met, for the first time, after their late separation, and had all possible honours paid them by the University. Here we rested in quiet quarters for several weeks, till the flight of King James into France; when the nation being left to take care of itself, the only security that could be found for it, was to advance the Prince and Princess of Orange to the vacant throne. The public tranquillity being now settled, our forces were remanded back to Nottingham. Here all our officers, who had commanded them from their first rising, received commissions to confirm them in their several posts; and at the same time, such private men as chose to return to their proper business or habitations, were offered their discharges. Among the small number of those, who received them, I was one; for not hearing that my name was in any of these new commissions, I thought it time for me to take my leave of ambition, as ambition had before seduced me from the imaginary honours of the gown, and therefore resolved to hunt my fortune in some other field.\*

\* Mr. Cibber's natural temperament was that of notorious timidity, which led him, we are justified in supposing, to relinquish his military pursuit. The players, who were subjected to his authority, had no other hold upon any of his passions to accomplish these views, and Mr. Victor related the following story in support of this imputation.

Bickerstaff, a comedian, whose benefit-play Sir Richard Steele, in No. 3 of the "Tattler," good naturedly recommended to the public as his relation, had acquired an income of £4 per week.

From Nottingham, I again returned to my father at Chatsworth, where I staid till my Lord came down, with the new honours of Lord Steward of his Majesty's household, and Knight of the Garter. A noble turn of fortune,—and a deep stake he had played for ;—which calls to my memory a story we had then in the family, which, though too light for our graver historians' notice, may be of weight enough for my humble memoirs. This noble lord being in the presence-chamber, in King James's time, and known to be no friend to the measures of his administration, a certain person in favour there, and desirous to be more so, took occasion to tread rudely upon his lordship's foot, which was returned with a sudden blow upon the spot. For this misdemeanour, his lordship was fined thirty thousand pounds; but I think had some time allowed him for the payment. In the summer preceding the revolution, when his lordship was retired to Chatsworth, and had been there deeply en-

Cibber, in an economical moment, retrenched one half of his salary, and was immediately waited upon by the impoverished actor, who knew from what quarter this diminution had arisen. He represented the largeness of his family, and concluded by flatly informing the cowardly manager, that, as he could not subsist upon the narrow allowance to which he had reduced him, he must call the author of his distress to account, for that he would rather perish by the sword, than die from starvation. The affrighted Cibber referred him to the next Saturday for answer, when he found his usual stipend was restored to its plenary amount."—"Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 437.

To Cibber's passive valour, Lord Chesterfield ironically alludes in a weekly paper, called "Common Sense :"—"of all the comedians who have appeared on the stage in my memory, no one has taken a kicking with such humour as our excellent laureat:" and it is said that Gay gave him some *striking* proofs of the resentment he felt against him for the manner in which, when acting *Bays*, he alluded to his comedy of "Three Hours after Marriage."

gaged with other noblemen, in the measures which soon after brought it to bear, King James sent a person down to him, with offers to mitigate his fine, upon conditions of ready payment, to which his lordship replied, "that if his Majesty pleased to allow him a little longer time, he would rather chuse to play 'double or quit' with him." The time of the intended rising being then so near at hand, the demand, it seems, came too late for a more serious answer.

However low my pretensions to preferment were at this time, my father thought that a little court-favour added to them, might give him a chance for saving the expense of maintaining me, as he had intended, at the University. He therefore ordered me to draw up a petition to the duke, and to give it some air of merit, to put it into Latin, the prayer of which was, that his grace would be pleased to do something (I really forget what) for me. However, the duke, upon receiving it, was so good as to desire my father would send me to London in the winter, where he would consider of some provision for me. It might, indeed, well require time to consider it: for I believe it was the harder to know what I was really fit for, than to have got me any thing I was not fit for. However, to London I came, where I entered into my first state of attendance and dependance for about five months, till the February following. But, alas! in my intervals of leisure, by frequently seeing plays, my wise head was turned to higher views; I saw no joy in any other life than that of an actor; so that, as before, when a candidate at Winchester, I was even afraid of succeeding to the preferment I sought for. 'Twas on the stage alone I had formed a happiness preferable to all that camps or courts could offer me, and there was I determined, let father and mother take it as they pleased, to fix my non ultra. Here I think myself obliged, in respect to the honour of that noble lord, to acknowledge, that I believe his real intentions to do well for me were prevented by my own inconsiderate

folly ; so that if my life did not then take a more laudable turn, I have no one but myself to reproach for it ; for I was credibly informed by the gentlemen of his household, that his grace had, in their hearing, talked of recommending me to the Lord Shrewsbury, then Secretary of State, for the first proper vacancy in that office. But the distant hope of a reversion was too cold a temptation for a spirit impatient as mine, that wanted immediate possession of what my heart was so differently set upon. The allurements of a theatre are still so strong in my memory, that perhaps few, except those who have felt them, can conceive : and I am yet so far willing to excuse my folly, that I am convinced, were it possible to take off that disgrace and prejudice, which custom has thrown upon the profession of an actor, many a well-born younger brother, and beauty of low fortune, would gladly have adorned the theatre, who by their not being able to brook such dishonour to their birth, have passed away their lives decently unheeded and forgotten.

Many years ago, when I was first in the management of the theatre, I remember a strong instance, which will show you what degree of ignominy the profession of an actor was then held at. A lady, with a real title, whose female indiscretions had occasioned her family to abandon her, being willing, in her distress, to make an honest penny of what beauty she had left, desired to be admitted as an actress ; when, before she could receive our answer, a gentleman, probably by her relations' permission, advised us not to entertain her, for reasons easy to be guessed. You may imagine we could not be so blind to our interest as to make an honourable family our unnecessary enemies, by not taking his advice ; which the lady, too, being sensible of, she saw the affair had its difficulties, and therefore pursued it no farther. Now, is not it hard that it should be a doubt whether this lady's condition or ours were the more melancholy ? For, here you find her honest endeavour to get bread from the

stage was looked upon as an addition of new scandal to her former dishonour ; so that I am afraid, according to this way of thinking, had the same lady stooped to have sold patches and pomatum, in a band-box, from door to door, she might, in that occupation, have starved with less infamy, than had she relieved her necessities by being famous on the theatre. Whether this prejudice may have arisen from the abuses that so often have crept in upon the stage, I am not clear in ; though when that is grossly the case, I will allow there ought to be no limits set to the contempt of it. Yet in its lowest condition, in my time, methinks there could have been no pretence of preferring the band-box to the buskin ; but this severe opinion, whether merited or not, is not the greatest distress that this profession is liable to.

I shall now give you another anecdote, quite the reverse of what I have instanced, wherein you will see an actress as hardly used for an act of modesty, which, without being a prude, a woman, even upon the stage, may sometimes think it necessary not to throw off. This, too, I am forced to premise, that the truth of what I am going to tell you, may not be sneered at before it be known. About the year 1717, a young actress, of a desirable person, sitting in an upper box at the opera, a military gentleman thought this a proper opportunity to secure a little conversation with her ; the particulars of which were, probably, no more worth repeating, than it seems the *demoiselle* then thought them worth listening to ; for, notwithstanding the fine things he said to her, she rather chose to give the music the preference of her attention. This indifference was so offensive to his high heart, that he began to change the tender into the terrible, and, in short, proceeded at last to treat her in a style too grossly insulting, for the meanest female ear to endure unresented ; upon which, being beaten too far out of her discretion, she turned hastily upon

him, with an angry look, and a reply which seemed to set his merit in so low a regard, that he thought himself obliged in honour to take his time to resent it. This was the full extent of her crime, which his glory delayed no longer to punish, than till the next time she was to appear upon the stage. There, in one of her best parts, wherein she drew a favourable regard and approbation from the audience, he, dispensing with the respect which some people think due to a polite assembly, began to interrupt her performance, with such loud and various notes of mockery, as other young men of honour, in the same place, have sometimes made themselves undauntedly merry with. Thus, deaf to all murmurs or entreaties, of those about him, he pursued his point, even to throwing near her such trash as no person can be supposed to carry about him, unless to use on so particular an occasion.

A gentleman, then behind the scenes, being shocked at his unmanly behaviour, was warm enough to say, that no man but a fool or a bully could be capable of insulting an audience or a woman in so monstrous a manner. The former valiant gentleman, to whose ear the words were soon brought, by his spies, whom he had placed behind the scenes, to observe how the action was taken there, came immediately from the pit, in a heat, and demanded to know of the author of those words, if he was the person that spoke them ; to which he calmly replied, that though he had never seen him before, yet, since he seemed so earnest to be satisfied, he would do him the favour to own, that indeed the words were his, and that they would be the last words he should chuse to deny, whoever they might fall upon. To conclude, their dispute was ended the next morning in Hyde Park, where the determined combatant, who first asked for satisfaction, was obliged afterwards to ask his life, too ; whether he mended it or not, I have not yet heard ; but

his antagonist, in a few years after, died in one of the principal posts of the government.

Now though I have, sometimes, known these gallant insulters of audiences, draw themselves into scrapes, which they have less honourably got out of, yet, alas! what has that availed? This generous public-spirited method of silencing a few was but repelling the disease in one part, to make it break out in another: all endeavours at protection are new provocations, to those who pride themselves in pushing their courage to a defiance of humanity. Even when a royal resentment has shown itself in the behalf of an injured actor, it has been unable to defend him from farther insults, an instance of which happened in the late King James's time. Mr. Smith,\* whose character as a

\* This judicious actor, who is said to have been originally a barrister, came into the Duke's Company, when acting under Sir William D'Avenant, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, about the year 1663, and made his début, according to conjecture, as the Corregidor in Tuke's "Adventures of Five Hours." (1) He rose soon after to the duties of *Buckingham*, in "King Henry the Eighth," and subsequently filled a range of characters distinguished by their variety and importance. *Sir William Stanley*, in Caryl's wretched play of the "English Princess," procured him additional estimation and applause, which were still farther enlarged by his performance of *Standford* in Shadwell's "Sullen Lovers." Mr. Smith was the original *Chamont* in Otway's "Orphan," and played many parts of as much local consequence in pieces that are now forgotten.

Chetwood informs us that Mr. Smith was zealously attached to the interests of King James the Second, in whose army, attended by two servants, he entered as a volunteer. Upon the abdication of that monarch, he returned to the stage, by the persuasions of many friends, who admired his performances, and resumed his

(1) This is the first part in which his appearance is noted by Downs the prompter.



gentleman, could have been no way impeached, had he not degraded it by being a celebrated actor, had the misfortune,

original part of *Wilmore* in the "Rover;" but having been received with considerable disapprobation, on account of his party principles, the audience was dismissed, and he departed from public life in the manner already mentioned. It is difficult to reconcile these discrepancies. Chetwood's minuteness looks like credibility, and Cibber has committed a mistake in stating that Mr. Smith "entirely quitted" the stage at this secession, he having returned in 1695, when at the earnest solicitations of his sincere friends Mr. Betterton and Mrs. Barry, strengthened by the influence of Congreve over many of his connections in high life, he consented to sustain the part of *Scandal* in that author's comedy of "Love for Love," upon its production at the new theatre in Little Lincoln's Inn Fields, when his inimitable performance imparted an extra charm to that admirable play. Continued peals of applause attested the satisfaction which his auditors felt at the return of their old favourite, and it seems singular that Congreve should have wholly overlooked this memorable event, in the "prologue" at least, where the defection of Williams and Mrs. Mountfort is thus obscurely stated :

Forbear your wonder, and the fault forgive,  
If in our larger family we grieve  
One falling Adam, and one tempted Eve.

These individuals deserted from the new colony before a single performance had taken place, and returned to their original employment in Drury-lane, from a refusal on the part of Betterton and his associates to reward their services by a fair equivalent. Mr. Smith continued on the stage till about twelve months after this period, when, according to Downs, having a long part in Banks's tragedy of "Cyrus," (2) he fell sick on the fourth day of performance, and died from a cold, as Chetwood relates, occasioned by cramp, which having seized him while in bed, he rose to

in a dispute with a gentleman behind the scenes, to receive a blow from him. The same night an account of this ac-

get rid of it, and remained so long in his naked condition, that a fever ensued from disordered lungs, and, in three days, put an end to his existence.

Barton Booth appears to have entertained a profound reverence for the abilities of Mr. Smith, upon whose death he composed the following inscription :

Scenicus eximius,  
 Regnante Carolo Secundo :  
 Bettertono coetaneus et amicus,  
 Nec non propemodum æqualis :  
 Haud ignobile stirpe oriundus,  
 Nec literarum rudis humaniorum.  
 Rem scenicam  
 Per multos feliciter annos administravit,  
 Justoque moderamine, et modum suavitate,  
 Omnium inter theatrum  
 Observantiam, extra theatrum laudem,  
 Ubique benevolentiam et amorem, sibi conciliavit.(3)

We have but a slender clue to the stage-management of Mr. Smith, which was exercised over the Duke's Company in Dorset-

(3) Or, in English, as follows :

An excellent actor,  
 Flourishing in the reign of Charles the Second ;  
 Betterton's cotemporary and friend,  
 And very near him in merit :  
 Sprung from a genteel family  
 And no stranger to polite literature.  
 In the management of the drama  
 He acquitted himself many years with deserved success ;  
 And, by a just deportment and sweetness of temper,  
 Gained respect of all within the theatre,  
 The praise of all without it,  
 And every where retained the friendship  
 And affection of mankind.

tion was carried to the king, to whom the gentleman was represented so grossly in the wrong, that, the next day his

garden, conjointly with Betterton and Dr. D'Avenant, when the famous agreement which bears their signatures was concluded with Hart and Kynaston, for an union of the theatres. It has been said that Booth applied to him for an engagement, which was refused from a fear of offending his relatives, but with that kindness of expression and deportment so warmly distinguished in his epitaph. This assertion, however, is unfounded, for when Mr. Smith died, Barton Booth was a Westminster scholar, and in the fourteenth year of his age; the character of this eminent comedian must, accordingly have been drawn up from such intelligence as the writer acquired at a subsequent period.(4)

It only remains to be remarked, that Chetwood has placed Mr. Smith's original return to the stage in the year 1692; but, not to insist upon the known looseness of this writer's information, let us ask if a political offence would be so vehemently remembered, after the lapse of four years, as to drive an estimable actor from the harmless pursuance of his ordinary duties? Cibber is doubtless correct in the floating date of this fact, which must have happened *previous* to the revolution. Mr. Smith was a principal actor in Lee's later tragedies, but in the "Princess of Cleve," 4to, 1689, we find the part he would naturally have played to Betterton's *Nemours*, supported by Mr. Williams.

Smith's value as an actor, may be immediately felt by a reference to the parts he enjoyed under Betterton, with whom he lived till death in the most cordial manner, enhancing his fame by honourable emulation, and promoting his interests by unbroken amity. No instance has been recorded of their dissention or dispute, and from the notice which Betterton extended to Booth, he very possibly communicated that high account of his departed friend, which the latter has recorded with such spirit and fidelity.

From Cibber's admission, it appears, that Smith's moral quali-

(1) Davies's "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. III. p. 334.

majesty sent to forbid him the court upon it. This indignity cast upon a gentleman, only for having maltreated a player, was looked upon as the concern of every gentleman ; and a party was soon formed to assert and vindicate their honour, by humbling this favoured actor, whose slight injury had been judged equal to so severe a notice. Accordingly, the next time Mr. Smith acted, he was received with a chorus of cat-calls, that soon convinced him he should not be suffered to proceed in his part ; upon which, without the least discomposure, he ordered the curtain to be dropped ; and, having a competent fortune of his own, thought the conditions of adding to it, by his remaining upon the stage, were too dear, and from that day entirely quitted it.\* I shall make no observation upon the king's resentment, or on that of his good subjects ; how far either was, or was not right, is not the point I dispute for : be that as it may, the unhappy condition of the actor was so far from being relieved by this royal interposition in his favour, that it was the worse for it.

While these sort of real distresses, on the stage, are so unavoidable, it is no wonder that young people of sense, (though of low fortune,) should be so rarely found, to supply a succession of good actors. Why then may we not, in some measure, impute the scarcity of them, to the wanton inhumanity of those spectators, who have made it so terribly mean to appear there ? Were there no ground for this question, where could be the disgrace of entering into a society, whose institution, when not abused, is a delightful school of morality ; and where, to excel, requires as ample

ties and professional excellence procured him an extensive reception among people of rank, a patronage which his polished manners continued to exact, till society, by his death, sustained one of its deepest deprivations.

\* 'This mistake is corrected in the foregoing note.

endowments of nature,\* as any one profession, that of holy institution excepted, whatsoever? But, alas, as Shakspeare says,

Where is that palace, whereinto foul things,  
Sometimes, intrude not?

Look into St. Peter's at Rome, and see what a profitable farce is made of religion there. Why then is an actor more blemished than a cardinal, while the excellence of the one arises from his innocently seeming what he is not, and the eminence of the other, from the most impious fallacies that can be imposed upon human understanding? If the best things, therefore, are most liable to corruption, the corruption of the theatre is no disproof of its innate and primitive utility.

In this light, therefore, all the abuses of the stage, all the low, loose, or immoral supplements, to wit, whether, in making virtue ridiculous, or vice agreeable, or in the decorated nonsense and absurdities of pantonimical trumpery, I give up to the contempt of every sensible spectator, as so much rank theatrical popery, but cannot still allow these enormities to impeach the profession, while they are so palpably owing to the depraved taste of the multitude. While vice and farcical folly are the most profitable com-

\* And what value is intrinsically attached to the most "ample endowments of nature?" They are spontaneous, and so far inferior to the slightest accomplishments that can be secured by laborious research, or unwearied cultivation. If the honours of acting, as we have long suspected, depend upon no other attributes than those that nature accords,—if its highest excellencies lie beyond the grasp of science or acuteness, and yet are attainable by strong nerves and a handsome form, we may pronounce it to be a profession which no being can embrace with any solid claims to intellectual consideration.

modities, why should we wonder that, time out of mind, the poor comedian, when real wit would bear no price, should deal in what would bring him most ready money? But this, you will say, is making the stage a nursery of vice and folly, or at least keeping an open shop for it.—I grant it: but who do you expect should reform it? The actors? Why so? If people are permitted to buy it, without blushing, the theatrical merchant seems to have an equal right to the liberty of selling it, without reproach. That this evil wants a remedy, is not to be contested; nor can it be denied, that the theatre is as capable of being preserved, by a reformation, as matters of more importance, which, for the honour of our national taste, I could wish were attempted; and then, if it could not subsist, under decent regulations, by not being permitted to present any thing there, but what were worthy to be there, it would be time enough to consider, whether it were necessary to let it totally fall, or effectually support it.

Notwithstanding all my best endeavours to recommend the profession of an actor to a more general favour, I doubt, while it is liable to such corruptions, and the actor himself to such unlimited insults, as I have already mentioned, I doubt, I say, we must still leave him a-drift, with his intrinsic merit, to ride out the storm as well as he is able.

However, let us now turn to the other side of this account, and see what advantages stand there, to balance the misfortunes I have laid before you. There we shall still find some valuable articles of credit, that sometimes overpay his incidental disgraces.

First, if he has sense, he will consider, that as these indignities are seldom or never offered him by people that are remarkable for any one good quality, he ought not to lay them too close to his heart. He will know, too, that

when malice, envy, or a brutal nature, can securely hide or fence themselves in a multitude, virtue, merit, innocence, and even sovereign superiority, have been, and must be equally liable to their insults; that, therefore, when they fall upon him in the same manner, his intrinsic value cannot be diminished by them. On the contrary, if, with a decent and unruffled temper, he lets them pass, the disgrace will return upon his aggressor, and perhaps warm the generous spectator into a partiality in his favour.

That while he is conscious, that, as an actor, he must be always in the hands of injustice, it does him at least this involuntary good, that it keeps him in a settled resolution to avoid all occasions of provoking it, or of even offending the lowest enemy, who, at the expense of a shilling, may publicly revenge it.

That, if he excels on the stage, and is irreproachable in his personal morals and behaviour, his profession is so far from being an impediment, that it will be oftener a just reason for his being received among people of condition with favour; and sometimes with a more social distinction, than the best, though more profitable trade he might have followed, could have recommended him to.\*

\* What is the familiarity with which our more notorious exhibitors on the stage are treated by persons of lofty rank and intellectual power, but a gross violation of their own attributes, and a flagrant departure from inherent propriety? If a singer, for instance, the mere possessor of fine natural organs, is not only encouraged in the sphere of public exertion, but flattered by the smiles of private favour, such monstrous affability is neither due to the individual on whom it falls, nor consistent with the quarter from which it proceeds. Yet such a pander to public enjoyment inhales the very sunshine of worldly splendour, and while talents of laborious growth or general utility are excluded from observation, this

That this is a happiness to which several actors, within my memory, as Betterton, Smith, Mountfort, Captain Griffin,\* and Mrs. Bracegirdle, (yet living,) have arrived at; to which I may add the late celebrated Mrs. Oldfield. Now let us suppose these persons, the men, for example, to have been all eminent mercers, and the women as famous milliners, can we imagine, that merely as such, though endowed with the same natural understanding, they could have been called into the same honourable parties of conversation?† People of sense and condition could not but know, it was impossible they could have had such various excellencies on the stage, without having something naturally valuable in them: and I will take upon me to affirm, who knew them all living, that there was not one of

paltry machine of unsubstantial amusement sweeps through the rosy walks of life, surrounded with affluence, and courted by power.

\* This gentleman joined the King's Company at the period when Haynes and others were added to its numbers, and is first mentioned by Downs for *Varnish*, in the "Plain-dealer;" 4to, 1677. He is afterwards set down for *Lysimachus*, in the "Rival Queens;" *Serapion*, in "All for Love;" *Archelaus*, in "Mithridates;" and *Southampton*, in the "Unhappy Favourite." Upon the junction of the establishments in 1682, Mr. Griffin is said to have abided by Mohun in his opposition to their united measures; we find him, however, recorded for *Pontius*, in "Valentinian;" 4to, 1685. During that year his performance of *Surly*, in "Sir Courtly Nice," excited uncommon admiration; his *Sir Edward Belford*, in the "Squire of Alsatia," was also deemed a master-piece; and his assumption of *Manly*, in the "Plain-dealer," upon the retirement of Hart, enhanced his reputation to the utmost.

Cibber bears evidence to the esteem in which Griffin was privately held, and we have only to lament that nothing farther can be related of so valuable an actor.

† Certainly not; but, "with the same natural understanding," they would as fully have deserved it.



the number, who were not capable of supporting a variety of spirited conversation, though the stage were never to have been the subject of it.

That, to have trod the stage has not always been thought a disqualification from more honourable employments; several have had military commissions; Carlile\* and Wiltshire† were both killed captains; one, in King William's reduction of Ireland; and the other, in his first war, in Flanders; and the famous Ben Jonson, though an unsuccessful actor, was afterwards made poet-laureat.

To these laudable distinctions let me add one more; that of public applause, which, when truly merited, is, perhaps, one of the most agreeable gratifications that venial vanity can feel. A happiness, almost peculiar to the actor, insomuch that the best tragic writer, however numerous his separate admirers may be, yet, to unite them into one general act of praise, to receive at once, those thundering peals of approbation, which a crowded theatre throws out, he must still call in the assistance of the skilful actor,‡ to raise and partake of them.

\* James Carlile, whom Downs alludes to as having "grown," about 1682, "to the maturity of a good actor," was a native of Lancashire, and embraced his theatrical life upon the boards of Drury-lane. That he joined the united companies, there is ample reason to believe, but his choice was at length directed to the profession of arms, which he followed beneath the conduct of King William the Third, in whose service he fought and fell at the battle of Aughrim, in Ireland, on the 11th of July, 1691. \*

Mr. Carlile produced a comedy, called the "Fortune-hunters," which experienced a favourable reception.

† This actor is merely mentioned by Downs, as adhering to the fortunes of Mohun, in his contest with the united companies, after their famous junction in 1682.

‡ However unimpeachably this rule might have been admitted to prevail in the time of Mr. Cibber, an actor has now but little

In a word, it was in this flattering light only, though not perhaps so thoroughly considered, I looked upon the life of an actor, when but eighteen years of age ; nor can you wonder, if the temptations were too strong for so warm a vanity as mine to resist ; but, whether excusable or not, to the stage, at length, I came, and it is from thence, chiefly, your curiosity, if you have any left, is to expect a farther account of me.\*

reason to court the “thundering peals” of popular applause, by any other requisites than those of adventurous novelty, and newspaper approbation.

\* It is a pity for Mr. Cibber, that one of Cumberland’s apostrophes to the stage was not in being at the time his sorrows for its degradation were penned. I shall transcribe this *morceau*, however, as a peace-offering to such of the fraternity as my unguarded doubts of their superior value may have tended to incense.

Wonderful in all ages, and honoured by all enlightened nations, hath been the actor’s magic art ; the theatres and forums of Greece were embellished with his statues ; they gazed upon him “like a descended god ;” their greatest poets, down to Æschylus and Aristophanes, trod the stage in person : Rome also honoured her actors, and they in return were the grace and ornament of all societies ; their sayings were recorded, and collections of their apothegms have come down to our times ; Caesar, in all his power, made suit to them, and even knights of Rome did not revolt from the profession.

Yet, surely, it remains to be lamented, after all this mass of eulogium, that the man who only brings the Muse’s bantlings into the world, has a better lot in it than he who claims the credit of begetting them.

## CHAP. IV.

*A short view of the stage, from the year 1660, to the revolution.  
—The King's and Duke's Companies united, composed the  
best set of English actors yet known.—Their several theatrical  
characters.*

THOUGH I have only promised you an account of all the material occurrences of the theatre during my own time, yet there was one which happened not above seven years before my admission to it, which may be as well worth notice, as the first great revolution of it, in which, among numbers, I was involved. And as the one will lead you into a clearer view of the other, it may therefore be previously necessary to let you know that King Charles the Second, at his Restoration, granted two patents, one to Sir William D'Avenant,\* and the other to Thomas Kille-

\* To this gentleman the English stage stands more deeply indebted than to any other individual, so far as zealous application deserves to be considered, in promoting those rational pleasures that are fittest for the entertainment of a civilised people.

Having been created poet-laureat at the death of Jonson, as a further mark of royal favour, he was complimented with his Majesty's letters-patent to direct a theatrical company, bearing date at Westminster, the six-and-twentieth day of March, 1639. In pursuance of this latent authority, Sir William D'Avenant put himself at the head of a company collected for temporary entertainment; and having obtained a fresh license from Charles the Se-

grew,\* Esq. ; and their several heirs and assigns, for ever, for the forming of two distinct companies of comedians. The first were called the King's Servants, and acted at the Theatre Royal in Drury-lane ; and the other the Duke's Company, who acted at the Duke's Theatre, in Dorset-garden. About ten of the King's Company were on the royal household-establishment, having each ten yards of scarlet cloth, with a proper quantity of lace allowed them for liveries ; and in their warrants from the Lord Chamberlain, were styled Gentlemen of the Great Chamber. Whether the like appointments were extended to the Duke's Company, I am not certain ; but they were both in high estimation with the public, and so much the delight and concern of the court, that they were not only supported by its being frequently present at their public presentations, but by its taking cognisance even of their private government, inso-

cond, on the fifteenth day of January, 1662, he opened his new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, with a piece in which Mr. Betterton introduced the moving scenes and other decorations, never publicly seen till that period upon the British stage.

He continued to manage the Duke's Company, which was afterwards removed to a more magnificent theatre in Dorset-garden, till the time of his death, an event that happened on the seventeenth of April, 1688, in the sixty-fourth year of his age.

\* The facetious Mr. Killegrew was page of honour to King Charles the First, and faithfully adhered to that hapless monarch till the period of his untimely death ; after which he attended his son into exile, to whom he was highly acceptable on account of his many convivial qualities. At the restoration he was appointed a groom of the bedchamber, and complimented with one of the patents, empowering him to preside over a certain set of actors, to be denominated the Company of the King and his Royal Consort. He died at Whitehall, on the nineteenth of March, 1682.

much, that their particular differences, pretensions, or complaints, were generally ended by the king or duke's personal command or decision. Besides their being thorough masters of their art, these actors set forwards with two critical advantages, which perhaps may never happen again in many ages. The one was, their immediate opening after the so long interdiction of plays, during the civil war, and the anarchy that followed it. What eager appetites from so long a fast must the guests of those times have had, to that high and fresh variety of entertainments which Shakspeare had left prepared for them? Never was a stage so provided! a hundred years are wasted, and another silent century well advanced, and yet what unborn age shall say, Shakspeare has his equal? How many shining actors have the warm scenes of his genius given to posterity, without being himself, in his action, equal to his writing! A strong proof that actors, like poets, must be born such. Eloquence and elocution are quite different talents: Shakspeare could write "Hamlet," but tradition tells us, that the ghost in the same play, was one of his best performances as an actor: nor is it within the reach of rule or precept to complete either of them. Instruction, it is true, may guard them equally against faults or absurdities, but there it stops; nature must do the rest: to excel in either art, is a self-born happiness, which something more than good sense must be the mother of.\*

\* "There is such a combination of natural gifts requisite to the formation of a complete actor, that it is more a case of wonder how so many good ones are to be found, than why so few instances of excellence can be produced. Every thing, that results from nature alone, lies out of the province of instruction, and no rules that I know of will serve to give a fine form, a fine voice, or even those fine feelings, which are amongst the first properties of an

The other advantage I was speaking of is, that before the Restoration, no actresses had ever been seen upon the English stage.\* The characters of women, on former

actor. These in fact are tools and materials of his trade, and these, neither his own industry, nor any man's assistance can bestow. But the right use and application of them is another question, and there he must look for his directions from education, industry, and judgment."—Cumberland's "Observer," No. 59.

\* Their introduction was expressly stipulated for in Sir William D'Avenant's patent, as the following extract will evince :

— And *for as much as* many plays, formerly acted, do contain several profane, obscene, and scurrilous passages ; and *the women's parts* therein have been acted by men in the habits of women, AT WHICH SOME HAVE TAKEN OFFENCE ; *for the preventing of these abuses for the future*, WE do hereby strictly command and enjoin, that from henceforth no new play shall be acted by either of the said companies, containing any passages offensive to piety and good manners, nor any old or revived play, containing any such offensive passages as aforesaid, until the same shall be corrected and purged, by the said Masters or Governors of the said Companies, from all such offensive and scandalous passages as aforesaid. And WE do likewise *permit and give leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either of the said two companies, for the time to come, may be performed by women*, as long as these recreations, which, by reason of the abuses aforesaid, were scandalous and offensive, may, by such reformation, be esteemed not only harmless delights, but useful and instructive representations of human life, to such of our good subjects as shall resort to the same.

Mrs. Betterton is said to have been the first woman, before her marriage, that appeared upon the English stage ; but this is an error, as a Mrs. Coleman represented *Ianthe* in the first part of D'Avenant's "Siege of Rhodes," in 1656. Andrew Pennycuik, so late as the year before, had played the heroine of Davenport's "King John."

It seems from a prologue written by Thomas Jordan, expressly "to introduce the first woman that came to act on the stage," that this lady, who performed *Desdemona*, was an unmarried woman, and as Ann Marshall was the principal unmarried actress in the

theatres, were performed by boys, or young men of the most effeminate aspect. And what grace, or master-strokes of action can we conceive such ungainly boys to have been capable of? This defect was so well considered by Shakspeare, that in few of his plays, he has any greater dependance upon the ladies, than in the innocence and simplicity of a *Desdemona*, an *Ophelia*, or in the short specimen of a fond and virtuous *Portia*. The additional objects, then, of real, beautiful women, could not but draw a proportion of new admirers to the theatre. We may imagine, too, that these actresses were not ill chosen, when it is well known, that more than one of them had charms sufficient at their leisure hours, to calm and mollify the cares of empire. Besides these peculiar advantages, they had a private rule or agreement, which both houses were happily tied down to, which was, that no play acted at one house, should ever be attempted at the other. All the capital plays, therefore, of Shakspeare, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson, were divided between them, by the approba-

royal company, soon after the time this prologue was written, she is perhaps entitled to its dubious distinction. It is said in Curl's "History of the Stage," a book of no authority, and has been repeated in various other compilations, that Mrs. Norris, the mother of the celebrated comedian well known by the name of *Jubilee Dicky*, (1) was the first actress who appeared upon the English stage; but this is highly improbable.

(1) Henry Norris was born in 1665, a fact which certainly does away the inference of Mr. Malone, that his mother was too old, eight or ten years before, to sustain so juvenile a part as *Desdemona*. It strikes me that the truth recorded by Downs, of her not being a principal actress in D'Avenant's company at the time of its opening, militates much more strongly against the tradition here contested. Davies, in his second volume of "Dramatic Miscellanies," speaks of her as Norris's *grandmother*.

tion of the court, and their own alternate choice : so that when Hart\* was famous for *Othello*, Betterton had no

\* Charles Hart was the great nephew of Shakspeare, his father, William, (1) being the eldest son of our poet's sister Joan. Brought up as an apprentice under Robinson, a celebrated actor, he commenced his career, conformably to the practice of that time, by playing female parts, among which the *Duchess*, in Shirley's tragedy of the "Carnival," was the first that exhibited his talents, or enhanced his reputation (2).

Puritanism having gathered great strength, opposed theatrical amusements as vicious and profane institutions, which it was at length enabled to abolish and suppress. On the 11th day of February, 1647, and the subsequent 22d of October, two ordinances were issued by the Long Parliament, whereby all stage-players were made liable to punishment for following their usual occupation. Before the appearance of this severe edict, most of the actors had gone into the army, and fought with distinguished spirit for their unfortunate master; when, however, his fate was determined, the surviving dependants on the drama were compelled to renew their former efforts, in pursuance of which they returned, just before the death of Charles, to act a few plays at the "Cockpit" theatre, where, while performing the tragedy of "Rollo," they were taken into custody by soldiers, and committed to prison (3). Upon this occasion, Hart, who had been a lieutenant of horse, under Sir Thomas Dallison, in Prince Rupert's own regiment, sustained the character of *Otto*, a part which he afterwards relinquished to

(1) "He settled in London, and was an actor."—Malone.

(2) "*Historia Histrionica*," a dialogue on old plays and players, printed at the end of this work; third edition, 1750.

(3) — "A party of foot-soldiers beset the house, surprised them about the middle of the play, and carried them away in their habits, not admitting them to shift, to Hatton-house, then a prison, where having detained them some time, they plundered them of their clothes, and let them loose again."—*Ibid.*



less a reputation for *Hamlet*. By this order, the stage was supplied with a greater variety of plays than could pos-

Kynaston, in exchange for the fierce energies of his ambitious brother.

At the Restoration, Hart was enrolled among the company constituting his Majesty's Servants, by whom the new Theatre Royal, Drury-lane, was opened on the 8th of April, 1663, with Beaumont and Fletcher's play of the "Humourous Lieutenant," in which he sustained a principal character for twelve days of successive representation (4).

About the year 1667, Hart introduced Mrs. Gwyn upon the dramatic boards, and has acquired the distinction of being ranked among that lady's first felicitous lovers, by having succeeded to Lacy, in the possession of her charms (5). Nell had been tutored for the stage by these admirers in conjunction, and after testifying her gratitude to both, passed into the hands of Lord Buckhurst, by whom she was transferred to the custody of King Charles the Second.

The principal parts, according to D'Urfel, sustained by Mr. Hart, were *Arbaces*, in "King and No King;" *Aminor*, in the "Maid's Tragedy;" (6) *Othello*, *Relio*, *Brutus*, and *Alexander*

(4) The following curious announcement of this performance has been preserved :

*By His Majesty's Company of Comedians.*

At the New Theatre in Drury-lane,

This day, being Thursday, April 8, 1663, will be acted a Comedy, called

THE HUMOUROUS LIEUTENANT

*King* . . . . . Mr. Winterset.

*Demetrius* . . . . . Mr. Hart.

*Seleucus* . . . . . Mr. Burt.

*Leontus* . . . . . Major Mohun

*Lieutenant* . . . . . Mr. Chun.

*Celia* . . . . . Mrs. Marshal.

(5) This fact is declared in a satirical poem by Sir George Etherege, published with the "Lives of the most celebrated Beauties," &c. 1715.

(6) *Othello* was acted for a short time, by Burt, while Hart played *Cassio*.

sibly have been shown, had both companies been employed at the same time upon the same play ; which liberty, too, *the Great*. Such was his attraction in all these characters, that, to use the language of that honest prompter, “ if he acted in any of these but once in a fortnight, the house was filled as at a new play : especially *Alexander*, he acting that with such grandeur and agreeable majesty, that one of the court was pleased to honour him with this commendation—‘ that Hart might teach any king on earth how to comport himself.’ ” (7) His merit has also been specified as *Mosca*, in the “ Fox,” *Don John*, in the “ Chances,” and *Wild-blood*, in an “ Evening’s Love ;” which, however, according to the same authority, merely harmonised with his general efforts, in commanding a vast superiority over the best of his successors.

Rymer has said (8) that Hart’s action could throw a lustre round the meanest characters, and, by dazzling the eyes of the spectator, protect the poet’s deformities from discernment. He was taller, and more genteelly shaped than Mohun, on which account he probably claimed the choice of parts, and was prescriptively invested with the attributes of youth and agility. He possessed a consider-

He soon, however, took the lead of him, though a good actor, so effectually, as to monopolise this and every other capital part, not appropriated to Mohun, in the Drury-lane company.

(7) Vide “ Roscius Anglicanus,” and see the note upon Mohun, for a further corroboration of the vast esteem in which Hart was held.

(8) See this critic’s “ Tragedies of the last age considered.” His words are these :

“ What Mr. Hart delivers, every one takes upon content ; their eyes are prepossessed and charmed by his action, before aught of the poet’s can approach their ears ; and to the most wretched of characters he gives a lustre and brilliant, which dazzles the sight, that the deformities in the poetry cannot be perceived.”

In addition to this tribute, another contemporary writer pays Hart the following homage :—

“ Were I a poet, nay a Fletcher, a Shakspeare, I would quit my own title to immortality, so that one actor might never die. This I may modestly say of him, (nor is it my particular opinion, but the sense of all mankind) that the best tragedies on the English stage have received their lustre from Mr. Hart’s performance ; that he has left such an impression behind him, that no less

must have occasioned such frequent repetitions of them, by their opposite endeavours to forestal and anticipate one

able share in the profits and direction of the theatre, which were divided among the principal performers; and besides his salary of £3 a week, and an allowance as a proprietor, amounting to six shillings and three-pence a day, (9) is supposed to have occasionally cleared about £1000 per annum. (10.)

On the 14th of October, 1681, an agreement was signed between Dr. D'Avenant, Thomas Betterton, and William Smith, on the one part, with Hart and Edward Kynaston, on the other, by which a junction was effected of the companies acting at the theatres in Drury-lane and Dorset-garden; an arrangement that received the sanction of King Charles himself, who had recommended this treaty, of which Betterton was a principal promoter. Declining age had rendered Hart less fit for exertion than in the vigour of life, and certain of the young actors, such as Goodman and Clark, (11) became impatient to get possession of his and Mohun's characters. A violent affliction, however, of the stone and gravel, compelled him to relinquish his professional efforts, (12) and having stipulated for the payment of five shillings a-day, dur-

than the interval of an age can make them appear again with half their majesty from any second hand."

(9) Vide Gildon's "Life of Betterton," 1710.

(10) — "for several years next after the restoration, every whole sharer in Mr. Hart's company got £1000 per annum."—Wright's "Historia Historionica."

(11) See p. 82.

(12) Downes expressly says, that Mr. Hart "never acted more, *by reason of his malady*."

From the preface to Settle's "Fatal Love," 4to. 1680, it should seem that he had retired from the stage, perhaps in the preceding year; for in the prologue to the "Ambitious Statesman," 1679, are these lines, evidently alluding to him and Mohun:

The time's neglect and maladies have thrown  
The two great pillars of our playhouse down.

another, that the best actors in the world must have grown

ing the season, (13) he retired from the stage, and died a short time after.

Hart was always esteemed a constant observer of decency in manners, and the following anecdote will evince his respect for the clergy. That witty, but abandoned fellow, Jo Haynes, had persuaded a silly divine, into whose company he had unaccountably fallen; that the players were a set of people, who wished to be reformed, and wanted a Chaplain to the Theatre, an appointment for which, with a handsome yearly income, he could undertake to recommend him. He then directed the clergyman to summon his hearers, by tolling a bell to prayers every morning, a scheme, in pursuance of which Haynes introduced his companion, with a bell in his hand, behind the scenes, which he frequently rang, and cried out, audibly, "Players! players! come to prayers!" While Jo and some others were enjoying this happy contrivance, Hart came into the theatre, and, on di-covering the imposition, was extremely angry with Haynes, whom he smartly reprehended, and having invited the clergyman to dinner, convinced him that this buffoon was an improper associate for a man of his function. (14.)

(13) In the agreement already alluded to, it was stipulated that that the managers of Dorset-garden, "do pay, or cause to be paid, out of the profits of acting, unto Charles Hart and Edward Kynaston, five shillings a-piece, for every day there shall be any tragedies, or comedies, or other representations acted," &c. &c.—Gildon's "Life of Betterton."

(14) Vide Davies's "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 264.

Another anecdote of the same kind is found in a "Life of the late famous comedian, J. Haynes," 8vo. 1701, which, as it preserves a characteristic trait of this valuable actor, is worth repeating.

"About this time, [1673] there happened a small pick between Mr. Hart and Jo, upon the account of his late negotiation in France,\* and there spending so much money to so little purpose, or, as I may more properly say, to no purpose at all.

\* Soon after the theatre in Drury-lane was burnt down, Jan. 1671-2, Haynes had been sent to Paris by Mr. Hart and Mr. Killegrew, to examine the machinery employed in the French Operas.—Malone.

tedious and tasteless to the spectator: for what pleasure is

Of this accomplished actor, the "Tattler," in No. 138, has preserved a very just remark on acting. "It was impossible," he said, "to act with grace, except the actor had forgotten that he was before an audience. Till he had arrived at that, his motion, his air, his every step and gesture have something in them which discovers he is under a restraint, for fear of being ill-received; or, if he considers himself as in the presence of those who approve his behaviour, you see an affectation of that pleasure run through his whole carriage." (15.)

Though versatility was, perhaps, the error of Hart's age, yet, even generally considered, that he never slackened the reins with which judgment had clothed the neck of genius, there seems ample

There happened to be one night a play acted, called "Cataline's Conspiracy," wherein there was wanting a great number of senators. Now Mr. Hart being chief of the house, would oblige Jo to dress for one of these senators, although his salary, being 50s. per week, freed him from any such obligation. But Mr. Hart, as I said before, being sole governor of the playhouse, and at a small variance with Jo, commands it, and the other must obey.

Jo being vexed at the slight Mr. Hart had put upon him, found out this method of being revenged on him. He gets a Scarborough dress, a large full ruff, makes himself whiskers from ear to ear, puts on his head a long Merry-Andrew's cap, a short pipe in his mouth, a little three-legged stool in his hand; and in this manner follows Mr. Hart on the stage, sets himself down behind him, and begins to smoke his pipe, laugh, and point at him, which comical figure put all the house in an uproar, some laughing, some clapping, and some hollaing. Now Mr. Hart, as those who knew him can aver, was a man of that exactness and grandeur on the stage, that let what would happen, he'd never discompose himself, or mind any thing but what he then represented; and had a scene fallen behind him, he would not at that time look back, to have seen what was the matter; which Jo knowing, remained still smoking. The audience continued laughing, Mr. Hart acting, and wondering at this unusual occasion of their mirth; sometimes thinking it some disturbance in the house, again that it might be something amiss in his dress: at last turning himself toward the scenes, he discovered Jo in the aforesaid posture; whereupon he immediately goes off the stage, swearing he would never set foot on it again, unless Jo was immediately turned out of doors, which was no sooner spoke, but put in practice."

(15) In the ninety-ninth number of this publication, Sir Richard Steele has particularised Hart's "natural and proper force," in the most striking manner.

not languid to satiety? \* It was, therefore, one of our greatest happinesses, during my time of being in the management of the stage, that we had a certain number of select plays, which no other company had the good fortune to make a tolerable figure in, and, consequently, could find little or no account by acting them against us. These plays, there-

reason to suppose. While distinguished as a tragedian, for the fierceness of jealousy, the pride of contention, and the fervour of love, in comedy he supported the gay gentleman with equal advantage. Rymer, an acute, though fastidious critic, has pointed out his merits with a lavish hand; and Downs, whose plain narrative has an air of invincible truth, expatiates with ardour upon his unparalleled excellence. The scanty particulars we have been able to collect, corroborate this evidence, though but in a trifling degree; yet, notwithstanding their deficiencies, it may be safely asserted that our dramatic annals, in Hart, were enriched with one of the brightest ornaments that admiration, at his period, could appreciate, or candour, in ours, can revere.

\* However highly inclined to appreciate the amusing powers of Mr. Cibber, in anecdote or narrative, we cannot help acceding to much of the severity with which his digressional arguments have been assailed. It strikes us that the reasons here assigned for a monopoly of theatrical pieces, are far from conclusive, and that competition, which he so strenuously decries, is at once the source of actorial excellence, and popular entertainment. Had Hart and Betterton *alternately* played *Othello* and *Hamlet*, the public observer of their respective merits would have frequented *both* the theatres at which they performed, to try them, in specific characters, by the test of comparison. As to any fear that the audiences would have been wearied by injudicious rivalry, or frequent repetition, we are too well acquainted with the playhouse aspirations after profit, to indulge the remotest idea of their protracted adherence to any measures that might thin the harvest of pecuniary advantage.

fore, for many years, by not being too often seen, never failed to bring us crowded audiences ; and it was to this conduct we owed no little share of our prosperity. But when four houses are at once, as very lately they were, all permitted to act the same pieces,\* let three of them perform never so ill, when plays come to be so harrassed and hackneyed out to the common people, half of which, too, perhaps, would as lieve see them at one house as another, the best actors will soon feel that the town has enough of them.

I know it is the common opinion, that the more play-houses, the more emulation ; I grant it ; but what has this emulation ended in ? Why, a daily contention which shall soonest surfeit you with the best plays ; so that when what ought to please, can no longer please, your appetite is again to be raised by such monstrous presentations, as dishonour the taste of a civilised people. If, indeed, to our several theatres we could raise a proportionable number of good authors, to give them all different employment, then, perhaps, the public might profit from their emulation : but while good writers are so scarce, and undaunted critics so plenty, I am afraid a good play, and a blazing star, will be equal rarities. This voluptuous expedient, therefore, of indulging the taste with several theatres, will amount to much the same variety as that of a certain œconomist, who, to enlarge his hospitality, would have two puddings and two legs of mutton, for the same dinner.† But, to resume the thread of my history.

These two excellent companies were both prosperous for some few years, till their variety of plays began to be ex-

\* Including the lesser theatres in the Haymarket and Goodman's Fields, which were restricted to minor amusements, by the Licensing Act, in 1738.

† —“ Another observation which I have made on our author's similes is, that they generally have an eye towards the kitchen. Thus, *two play-houses are like two puddings, or two legs of mut-*

hausted : then, of course, the better actors, which the king's seem to have been allowed, could not fail of drawing the greater audiences. Sir William D'Avenant,\* therefore master of the duke's company, to make head against their success, was forced to add spectacle and music to action ; and to introduce a new species of plays, since called dramatic operas, of which kind were the " Tempest," " Psyche," " Circe," and others, all set off with the most expensive decorations of scenes and habits, with the best voices and dancers.

This sensual supply of sight and sound, coming in to the assistance of the weaker party, it was no wonder they should grow too hard for sense and simple nature, when it is considered how many more people there are that can see and hear, than think and judge. So wanton a change of the public taste, therefore, began to fall as heavy upon the king's company, as their greater excellence in action had, before, fallen upon their competitors ; of which encroachment upon wit, several good prologues in those days frequently complained.

But, alas ! what can truth avail, when its dependence is much more upon the ignorant, than the sensible auditor ? A poor satisfaction, that the due praise given to it, must at last sink into the cold comfort of—*laudatur et alget*. Unprofitable praise can hardly give it a *soupe maigre*. Taste and fashion, with us, have always had wings, and fly from *ton*. \* \* \* \* \* As we cannot draw the sarcastical conclusion which would attend a less rich author, we must necessarily conclude that our biographer is too much inclined to write on a full stomach. —" Champion," May 6, 1740.

\* Mr. Cibber is correct in ascribing the introduction of dramatic operas to Sir William D'Avenant, though he died two years before the first of them, the " Tempest," was produced by Dryden, who had been his coadjutor in this barbarous deviation from the beauty of Shakspeare.



one public spectacle to another so wantonly, that I have been informed, by those who remember it, that a famous puppet-show, in Salisbury 'Change, then standing where Cecil-street now is, so far distressed these two celebrated companies, that they were reduced to petition the king for relief against it: nor ought we, perhaps, to think this strange, when, if I mistake not, Terence himself reproaches the Roman auditors of his time, with the like fondness for the *funambuli*, the rope-dancers.\* Not to dwell too long, therefore, upon that part of my history, which I have only collected from oral tradition, I shall content myself with telling you, that Mohun† and Hart now growing old, for,

\* The passage to which Cibber alludes, is in the prologue to "Hecyra:"—

*Ita populus studio stupidus in funambulo  
Animum occuparat.*

† The life of Michael Mohun, though passed in its early stage beneath a different teacher, was chequered by the very shades which distinguished that of Hart, with whom he acquired his military distinctions, and reverted to a theatrical life. He was brought up with Shatterel, (1) under Beeston, (2) at the "Cock-

(1) Robert and William Shatterel are enumerated in Downs's list of the king's company, as filled up at the opening of their new theatre, in 1663. One of these was a fellow-apprentice with Mohun, as already related, and having repaired to the standard of King Charles the First, was made quarter-master to the very troop of horse in which Hart was serving as lieutenant. Among other capital parts, he is recorded for *Bessus*, in "King and No King," and *Poins*, in the first part of "King Henry the Fourth." By one of the interlocutors in Wright's "Historia Histrionica," he is referred to as a performer of the highest eminence, and Downs ranks him as a "good actor," with Burt and Cartwright; but nothing farther can be traced of his merits or career.

(2) Christopher Beeston, a player, prefixed certain verses to Heywood's "Apology for Actors," and was undoubtedly the individual here alluded to. Another Beeston, of whom he was probably the father, is mentioned by Downs for *Roderigo*, in "Othello," *Nigrinus*, in "Tyramic Love," and *Fau Herrius*, in "Amboyna."

above thirty years before this time, they had severally borne the king's commission of major and captain, in the civil

pit,"(3) in Drury-lane, where, in Shirley's play of "Love's Cruelty," he sustained the part of *Bellamante*, among other female characters, and held it even after the restoration.

Having attained the rank of captain in the royal forces, Mohun went to Flanders upon the termination of the civil war, where he received pay as a major, and acquitted himself with distinguished credit. At the restoration, he resumed his pristine duties, and became an able second to Hart, with whom he was equally admired for superlative knowledge of his arduous profession.

He is celebrated by Lord Rochester, as the great *Æsopus* of the stage; praise, which, though coming from one of so capricious a temper, may be relied on, since it is confirmed by more respectable testimony. He was particularly remarkable for the dignity of his deportment, and the elegance of his step, which mimics, said his lordship, attempted to imitate, though they could not reach the sublimity of his elocution. The duke's comedians, it would seem, endeavoured to emulate his manner, when reduced by age and infirmity, a baseness which the same noble observer has thus warmly reprehended :—

Yet these are they who durst expose the age  
Of the great wonder of the English stage,  
Whom nature seem'd to form for your delight,  
And bade him speak as she bade Shakspere write;  
These blades, indeed, are cripples in their art,  
Mimic the foot, but not the speaking part;  
Let them the *Traitor* or *Volpone* try,  
Could they  
Rage like *Cethægus*, (4) or like *Cassius* die?

(3) This theatre, which also bore the designation of the "*Phœnix*," was termed a private house, being remarkably small in its dimensions, and the company performing at it were denominated the queen's servants.

(4) In Ben Jonson's "*Cataline*;" a part which Mohun apparently preferred to the more important and laborious character of *Cicero*.

wars,—and the younger actors, as Goodman,\* Clark,† and others, being impatient to get into their parts, and growing

Mohun, from his inferior height and muscular form, generally acted grave, solemn, austere parts, though upon more than one occasion, as in *Valentine*, in “Wit without Money,” and *Face*, in the “*Alchemist*,”—one of his most capital characters,—he was frequently seen in gay and buoyant assumptions to great advantage. He was singularly eminent as *Melantius*, in the “*Maid’s Tragedy* ;” *Mardonius*, in “*King and No King* ;” *Clytus*, *Mithridates*, and the parts alluded to by Lord Rochester. No man had more skill in putting spirit and passion into the dullest poetry than Mohun, an excellence with which Lee was so delighted, that on seeing him act his own *King of Pontus*, he suddenly exclaimed, “O, Mohun, Mohun, thou little man of mettle, if I should write a hundred plays, I’d write a part for thy mouth !” (5) And yet Lee himself was so exquisite a reader, that Mohun once threw down a part in despair of approaching the force of the author’s expression. The “*Tattler*” has adverted to his singular science ; (6) “in all his parts, too,” says Downs, “he was accurate and correct ;” and perhaps no encomium can transcend the honours of unbroken propriety.

About the year 1681, there are some reasons to suspect that the king’s company was divided by feuds and animosities, which their adversaries in Dorset-garden so well improved, as to produce an union of the separate patents. Hart and Kynaston were dexterously detached from their old associates, by the management of Betterton, (7) whose conduct, though grounded upon maxims of

(5) Vide Downs’s “*Roscius Anglicanus* ;” p. 17, ed. 1708.

(6) “My old friends Hart and Mohun, the one by his natural and proper force, the other *by his great skill and art*, never failed to send me home full of such ideas as affected my behaviour, and made me insensibly more courteous and humane to my friends and acquaintance.”—“*Tattler*,” No. 99.

(7) This memorable actor had been a fellow-apprentice, under Rhodes, with Kynaston, over whom it is supposed his influence was principally exerted.

intractable, the audiences, too, of both houses then falling off, the patentees of each, by the king's advice, which perhaps

policy, can derive no advantage from so unfair an expedient. Upon the completion of this nefarious treaty, Mohun, who found means to retain the services of Kynaston,(8) with the remnant of the royal company, continued to act in defiance of the junction just concluded, as an independent body. Downs, in his "*Roscus Anglicanus*," so far as the imperfect structure of its sentences can be relied on, expressly asserts this; and yet if "the patentees of each company united patents, and, by so incorporating, the duke's company were made the king's, and immediately removed to the Theatre Royal in Drury-lane," what field did Mohun and his followers select for their operations, to pitch their tents, and hoist their standard? Till some period, at least, of the year 1682, this party were in possession of their ancient domicile, as Mohun at that time, acted *Burleigh*, in Banks's "*Unhappy Favourite*," and sustained a principal character in Southern's "*Loyal Brother*," with, for his heroine, in both pieces, the famous Nell Gwyn.

If Hart's malady should not be admitted as a sufficient cause for their separation, we must then avow the validity of Mr. Davies's suspicion,(9) that these estimable actors, who had been fellow-soldiers in the royal cause, and partners in the direction of the theatre, at last, by some unhappy difference, became alienated from each other. Mohun, perhaps, felt dissatisfied with the conditions upon which Hart was contented to coalesce, and could not tamely bear the transfer of those laurels, which his comrade was anxious to relinquish. Be this as it may, their disunion most certainly ensued, and Mohun did not long survive it; dying, as Colley Cibber seems to intimate,(10) of a broken heart, and leaving no traces behind him

(8) Old Downs expressly mentions Kynaston among the adherents to Mohun; the rest of whom included Griffin, Goodman, Wiltshire, the father of George Powel, Mrs. Cory, Mrs. Boutel, and Mrs. Mountfort.

(9) Vide Davies's "*Dramatic Miscellanies*;" vol. III, p. 263.

(10) His words are emphatically these:—"This union, was, however, so much in favour of the duke's company, that Hart left the stage upon it,

amounted to a command, united their interests, and both companies into one, exclusive of all others, in the year

of his grand and original excellence, beyond the scattered scraps that Downs's pamphlet has recorded, and tradition was enabled to supply (11).

\* Cardell Goodman, according to his own admissions, as detailed by Cibber elsewhere, was expelled the university of Cambridge, for certain political reasons, (1) a disgrace, however, which did not disqualify him for the stage. He came upon it, accordingly, by repairing to Drury-lane theatre, where Downs has recorded his first appearance, as *Polyperchon*, in the "Rival Queens," 4to. 1677. Here, although we cannot trace his success in any character of importance, Mr. Cibber has adverted to his rapid advances in reputation. He followed the fortunes of Mohun in opposing the united actors, but, about three years afterwards, resorted to them, (in 1685,) and sustained the hero of Lord Rochester's "Valentinian." It is about this period that his excellence must have blazed out as

and Mohun survived not long after."—i. e. The effects of the measure were such, &c.

(11) The following extract from a pamphlet, called "A Comparison between the Two Stages," will amply evince the popular estimation in which Hart and Mohun were held :

"The late Duke of Monmouth was a good judge of dancing, and a good dancer himself; when he returned from France, he brought with him St. André, then the best master in France. The duke presented him to the stage, the stage to gratify the duke admitted him, and the duke himself thought he might prove a mighty advantage to them, though he had nobody else of his opinion. A day was published in the bills for him to dance, but not one more besides the duke and his friends came to see him; the reason was, the plays were then so good, and Hart and Mohun acted them so well, that the audience would not be interrupted, for so short a time, though 'twas to see the best master in Europe."

I suspect that Mohun was born about the year 1625, from the circumstance of his acting *Bellamante*, the heroine of Shirley's "Love's Cruelty," in 1640, when he had probably reached, and could hardly have exceeded, the age of fifteen years.

(1) "Dramatic Miscellanies."

1682.\* This union was, however, so much in favour of the duke's company, that Hart left the stage upon it, and Mohun survived not long after.

*Alexander the Great*, since Cibber, who went upon the stage in 1690, says Goodman had retired before the time of his appearance.

The highest salary enjoyed at that period we are now treating of, was six shillings and three pence per diem, a stipend that was by no means equal to the strong passions and large appetites of a gay, handsome, inconsiderate young fellow. He was consequently induced to commit a robbery on the highway, and sentenced upon detection, to make a summary atonement for his fatal error; but this being the first exploit of that kind to which the scantiness of his income had urged him, King James was persuaded to pardon him, a favour for which Goodman was so grateful, that, in the year 1696, he shared with Sir John Fenwick in a design to assassinate King William, who spared his life in consideration of the testimony he was to render against his accomplice. This condition, however, Goodman did not fulfil, as he withdrew clandestinely to the continent, to avoid giving evidence, and died in exile.

Having been selected as a fit instrument for her abandoned pleasures by the Duchess of Cleveland, Goodman, long before his death, became so happy in his circumstances, that he acted only at intervals, when his titled mistress most probably desired to see him; for he used to say, he would not even act *Alexander*, unless his duchess were in front to witness the performance.

† This actor is first mentioned by Downs for *Massina*, in "Sophonisba," 4to. 1676; he also played *Novel*, in the "Plain-dealer," and *Hephestion*, in the "Rival Queens," both 4to. 1677; *Aquilus*, in "Mithridates," 4to. 1678; and though Davies affects to have lost his name "after the junction of the companies in 1681," it appears for *Essex*, in Banks's "Unhappy Favourite," 4to. 1682.

\* Our author's date is 1684, but as the memorandum-agreement for this famous junction, was concluded on the 14th of October, 1681, and Downs unequivocally refers its occurrence in three dis-

One only theatre being now in possession of the whole town, the united patentees imposed their own terms upon the actors ; for the profits of acting were then divided into twenty shares, ten of which went to the proprietors, and the other moiety to the principal actors, in such sub-divisions as their different merit might pretend to. These shares of the patentees were promiscuously sold out to money-making persons, called adventurers, who, though utterly ignorant of theatrical affairs, were still admitted to a proportionate vote in the management of them ; all particular encouragements to actors were by them, of consequence, looked upon as so many sums deducted from their private dividends. While, therefore, the theatrical hive had so many drones in it, the labouring actors, surely, were under

tinct passages,(1) to the year we have adopted, Mr. Cibber's heedlessness is hardly worth more than a silent correction.

Gildon also, in his "Life of Betterton," explicitly asserts, that "*the union was effected in 1682.*" It is ascertained, however, from information supplied by Mr. Malone. that the united company opened Drury-lane Theatre, on the 16th of November, 1682, with a prologue and epilogue by Dryden.

(1) These passages run as follows -

"Many others were acted by the old company at the Theatre Royal, from the time they begun, till the patent descended to Mr. Charles Killegrew, which, in 1682, he joined to Dr. D'Avenant's patent, whose company acted then in Dorset-garden."

"Next follows an account of the rise and progression of the duke's servants, under the patent of Sir William D'Avenant ; who, upon the said junction in 1682, removed to the Theatre Royal in Drury-lane, and [were] created the king's company."

"All the preceding plays, being the chief that were acted in Dorset-garden, from November, 1671, to the year 1682 ; at which time the patentees of each company united patents, and, by so incorporating, the duke's company were made the king's company, and immediately removed to the Theatre Royal, in Drury-lane." .

the highest discouragement, if not a direct state of oppression. Their hardship will at least appear in a much stronger light, when compared to our later situation, who, with scarce half their merit, succeeded to be sharers under a patent upon five times easier conditions : for as they had but half the profits divided among ten, or more of them, we had three fourths of the whole profits divided only among three of us : and as they might be said to have ten task-masters over them, we never had but one assistant-manager, not an actor, joined with us ; who, by the crown's indulgence, was sometimes, too, of our own chusing. Under this heavy establishment, then, groaned this united company, when I was first admitted into the lowest rank of it. How they came to be relieved by King William's license, in 1695 ; how they were again dispersed, early in Queen Ann's reign ; and from what accidents Fortune took better care of us, their unequal successors, will be told in its place : but to prepare you for the opening so large a scene of their history, methinks I ought, in justice to their memory, too, to give you such particular characters of their theatrical merit, as in my plain judgment they seemed to deserve. Presuming, then, that this attempt may not be disagreeable to the curious, or the true lovers of the theatre, take it without farther preface.

In the year 1690, when I first came into this company, the principal actors then at the head of it were,—

*Of Men*,—Mr. Betterton, Mr. Mountfort, Mr. Kynaston, Mr. Sandford, Mr. Nokes, Mr. Underhill, and Mr. Leigh ;

*Of Women*,—Mrs. Betterton, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Leigh, Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Mountfort, and Mrs. Bracegirdle.

These actors, whom I have selected from their cotemporaries, were all original masters in their different styles, not



merely auricular imitators of one another, which commonly is the highest merit of the middle rank ; but self judges of nature, from whose various lights they only took their true instruction. If in the following account of them I may be obliged to hint at the faults of others, I never mean such observations should extend to those who are now in possession of the stage ; for, as I design not my memoirs shall come down to their time, I would not lie under the imputation of speaking in their disfavour to the public, whose approbation they must depend upon for support. But to my purpose.

Betterton was an actor, as Shakspeare was an author,—both without competitors, formed for the mutual assistance and illustration of each other's genius ! How Shakspeare wrote, all men who have a taste for nature may read and know,—but with what higher rapture would he still be *read*, could they conceive how Betterton *played* him ! Then might they know, the one was born alone to speak what the other only knew to write ! Pity it is, that the momentary beauties flowing from an harmonious elocution, cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record ; that the animated graces of the player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that presents them ; or at best can but faintly glimmer through the memory, or imperfect attestation, of a few surviving spectators. Could *how* Betterton spoke be as easily known as *what* he spoke, then might you see the muse of Shakspeare in her triumph, with all her beauties in their best array, rising into real life, and charming her beholders. But, alas ! since all this is so far out of the reach of description, how shall I show you Betterton ? Should I therefore tell you, that all the *Othellos*, *Hamlets*, *Hotspurs*, *Macbeths*, and *Brutus*, whom you may have seen since his time, have fallen far short of him,

this still would give you no idea of his particular excellence. Let us see, then, what a particular comparison may do,—whether that may yet draw him nearer to you.

You have seen a *Hamlet*, perhaps, who, on the first appearance of his father's spirit, has thrown himself into all the straining vociferation requisite to express rage and fury, and the house has thundered with applause, though the misguided actor was all the while, as Shakspeare terms it, *tearing a passion into rags*. I am the more bold to offer you this particular instance, because the late Mr. Addison, while I sat by him, to see this scene acted, made the same observation, asking me, with some surprise, if I thought *Hamlet* should be in so violent a passion with the *Ghost*, which, though it might have astonished, had not provoked him? for you may observe that in this beautiful speech, the passion never rises beyond an almost breathless astonishment, or an impatience, limited by filial reverence, to inquire into the suspected wrongs that may have raised him from his peaceful tomb, and a desire to know what a spirit so seemingly distressed might wish or enjoin a sorrowful son to execute, towards his future quiet in the grave. This was the light into which Betterton threw this scene, which he opened with a pause of mute amazement; then rising slowly to a solemn, trembling voice, he made the *Ghost* equally terrible to the spectator as to himself, and in the descriptive part of the natural emotions which the ghastly vision gave him, the boldness of his expostulation was still governed by decency, and manly but not braving; his voice never rising into that seeming outrage or wild defiance of what he naturally revered. But, alas! to preserve this medium, between mouthing and meaning too little,—to keep the attention more pleasingly awake by a tempered spirit, than by mere vehemence of voice,—is, of all the master-

strokes of an actor the most difficult to reach. In this none yet have equalled Betterton. But I am unwilling to show his superiority only by recounting the errors of those, who now cannot answer to them; let their farther failings, therefore, be forgotten. Or, rather, shall I in some measure excuse them? For I am not yet sure, that they might not be as much owing to the false judgment of the spectator, as the actor. While the million are so apt to be transported when the drum of their ear is so roundly rattled; while they take the life of elocution to lie in the strength of the lungs, it is no wonder the actor, whose end is applause, should be also tempted, at this easy rate, to excite it. Shall I go a little farther, and allow that this extreme is more pardonable than its opposite error? I mean that dangerous affection of the *monotone*, or solemn sameness of pronunciation, which to my ear is insupportable; for of all faults that so frequently pass upon the vulgar, that of flatness will have the fewest admirers. That this is an error of ancient standing, seems evident by what *Hamlet* says, in his instructions to the players; *viz.*

Be not too tame, neither, &c.

The actor, doubtless, is as strongly tied down to the rules of Horace as the writer:—

——Si vis me flere, dolendum est

Primum ipsi tibi.\*

\* *i. e.* If you would have me weep, you must first weep yourself.

“ This is not literally true, for it would have been as rightly said, if you do observe nature, that ‘ I shall certainly weep, if you do not.’ But what is intended by that expression, is, that it is not possible to give passion, except that you show you suffer yourself. Therefore, the true art seems to be, that when you would have the person you represent pitied, you must show him at once, in the

He that feels not himself the passion he would raise, will talk to a sleeping audience. But this never was the fault of Betterton; and it has often amazed me to see those who soon came after him, throw out, in some parts of a character, a just and graceful spirit, which Betterton himself could not but have applauded; and yet, in the equally shining passages of the same character, have heavily dragged the sentiment along, like a dead weight, with a long-toned voice, and absent eye, as if they had fairly forgotten what they were about. If you have never made this observation, I am contented you should not know where to apply it.

A farther excellence in Betterton was, that he could vary his spirit to the different characters he acted. Those wild impatient starts, that fierce and flashing fire, which he threw into *Hotspur*, never came from the unruffled temper of his *Brutus*—for I have, more than once, seen a *Brutus* as warm as *Hotspur*;—when the Betterton *Brutus* was provoked, in his dispute with *Cassius*, his spirit flew only to his eye; his steady look alone supplied that terror, which he disdained an intemperance in his voice should rise to. Thus, with a settled dignity of contempt, like an unheeding rock, he repelled upon himself the foam of *Cassius*. Perhaps the very words of Shakspeare will better let you into my meaning :

Must I give way, and room, to your rash choler?  
Shall I be frightened, when a madman stares?

And a little after :—

There is no terror, *Cassius*, in your threats, &c.

Not but in some part of this scene, where he reproaches highest grief, and struggling to bear it with decency and patience. In this case, we sigh for him, and give him every groan he suppresses.”—“ *Tatler* ;” No. 68.

*Cassius*, his temper is not under this suppression, but opens into that warmth which becomes a man of virtue ; yet this is that hasty spark of anger, which *Brutus* himself endeavours to excuse.

But with whatever strength of nature we see the poet show, at once, the philosopher and the hero, yet the image of the actor's excellence will be still imperfect to you, unless language could put colours in our words to paint the voice with.

*Et, si vis similem pingere, pingere sonum*, is enjoining an impossibility. The most that a Vandyke can arrive at, is, to make his portraits of great persons seem to *think* ; a Shakspeare goes farther yet, and tells you *what* his pictures thought ; a Betterton steps beyond them both, and calls them from the grave, to breathe, and be themselves again, in feature, speech, and motion. When the skilful actor shows you all these powers at once united, and gratifies at once your eye, your ear, your understanding, to conceive the pleasure rising from such harmony, you must have been present at it ;—'tis not to be told you.

There cannot be a stronger proof of the charms of harmonious elocution, than the many even unnatural scenes and flights of the false sublime it has lifted into applause. In what raptures have I seen an audience at the furious fustian and turgid rants in Nat. Lee's "*Alexander the Great* !" For though I can allow this play a few great beauties, yet it is not without its extravagant blemishes.\* Every play of

\* " Though the taste of wit and pleasure is at present but very low in this town, yet there are some that preserve their relish undebauched with common impressions, and can distinguish between reality and imposture. A gentleman was saying here (1) this evening, that he would go to the play to-morrow night to see heroism, as it has been represented by some of our tragedians, represented in burlesque. It seems the play of "*Alexander*" is to be then turned

(1) Will's Coffee-house.

the same author has more or less of them. Let me give you a sample from this. *Alexander*, in a full crowd of into ridicule for its bombast, and other false ornaments in the thought as well as the language. The bluster *Alexander* makes is as much inconsistent with the character of an hero, as the roughness of *Clytus*, an instance of the sincerity of a bold artless soldier. To be plain is not to be rude, but rather inclines a man to civility and deference; not indeed to show it in the gestures of the body, but in the sentiments of the mind. It is, among other things, from the impertinent figures unskilful dramatists draw of the characters of men, that youth are bewildered and prejudiced in their sense of the world, of which they have no notions but what they draw from books, and such representations. Thus, talk to a very young man, let him be of never so good sense, and he shall smile when you speak of sincerity in a courtier, good sense in a soldier, or honesty in a politician. The reason of this is, that you hardly see one play wherein each of these ways of life is not drawn by hands that know nothing of any one of them; and the truth is so far of the opposite side to what they paint, that it is more impracticable to live in esteem in courts, than any where else, without sincerity. Good sense is the great requisite in a soldier, and honesty the only thing that can support a politician. This way of thinking made the gentleman of whom I was just now speaking, say, he was glad any one had taken upon him to depreciate such unnatural fustian as the tragedy of "Alexander." The character of that prince indeed was, that he was unequal, and given to intemperance; but in his sober moments, when he had warm in his imagination the precepts of his great instructor, he was a pattern of generous thoughts and dispositions, in opposition to the strongest desires which are incident to a youth and conqueror. But instead of representing that hero in the glorious character of generosity and chastity, in his treatment of the beauteous family of Darius, he is drawn all along as a monster of lust, or of cruelty; as if the way to raise him to the degree of an hero, were to make his character as little like that of a worthy man as possible. Such rude and indigested draughts of things are the

courtiers, without being occasionally called or provoked to it, falls into this rhapsody of vain-glory :—

Can none remember,—Yes, I know all must !——

And therefore they shall know it again——

When Glory, like the dazzling eagle, stood  
Perch'd on my beaver, in the Granic flood ;  
When Fortune's self my standard, trembling, bore,  
And the pale Fates stood frighted on the shore ;  
When the immortals on the billows rode,  
And I myself appear'd the leading god ?

When these flowing numbers came from the mouth of a Betterton, the multitude no more desired sense to them, than our musical connoisseurs think it essential in the celebrated airs of an Italian opera. Does not this prove, that there is very near as much enchantment in the well-governed voice of an actor, as in the sweet pipe of an eunuch ? If I tell you there was no one tragedy, for many years more in favour with the town than “Alexander,” to what must we impute this its command of public admiration ? Not to its intrinsic merit, surely, if it swarms with passages like this I have shown you ! If this passage has merit, let us see what figure it would make upon canvas—what sort of picture would rise from it. If Le Brun, who was famous for painting the battles of this hero, had seen this lofty description, what one image could he have possibly taken from it ? In what colours would he have shown us Glory perched upon a beaver ? How would he have drawn Fortune trembling ? Or, indeed, what use could he have made of pale Fates, or Immortals riding upon billows, with this blustering god, of

proper objects of ridicule and contempt, and depreciating Alexander as we have him drawn, is the only way of restoring him to what he was in himself.”—“Tattler,” No. 191.

his own making, at the head of them? \* Where, then, must have lain the charm, that once made the public so partial to this tragedy? Why, plainly, in the grace and harmony of the actor's utterance. For the actor himself is not accountable for the false poetry of his author; that, the hearer is to judge of; if it passes upon him, the actor can have no quarrel to it; who, if the periods given him are round, smooth, spirited, and high-sounding, even in a false passion, must throw out the same fire and grace, as may be required in one justly rising from nature; where those his excellencies will then be only more pleasing in proportion to the taste of his hearer. And I am of opinion, that to the extraordinary success of this very play, we may impute the corruption of so many actors, and tragic writers, as were immediately misled by it. The unskilful actor, who imagined all the merit of delivering those blazing rants, lay only in the strength and strained exertion of the voice, began to tear his lungs, upon every false or slight occasion, to arrive at the same applause. And it is from hence I date our having seen the same reason prevalent, for above fifty years. Thus equally misguided, too, many a barren-brained author has streamed into a frothy flowing style, pompously rolling into sounding periods, *signifying* — roundly, *nothing*; of which number, in some of my former labours, I am something more

\* The criticisms of Cibber upon a literary subject are hardly worth the trouble of confuting, and yet it may be mentioned that Bishop Warburton adduced these lines as containing not only the most sublime, but the most judicious imagery that poetry can conceive. If Le Brun, or any other artist, could not succeed in portraying the terrors of fortune, it conveys, perhaps, the highest possible compliment to the powers of Lee, to admit that he has mastered a difficulty beyond the most daring aspirations of an accomplished painter.



than suspicious, that I may myself have made one. But to keep a little closer to Betterton.

When this favourite play I am speaking of, from its being too frequently acted, was worn out, and came to be deserted by the town, upon the sudden death of Mountfort,\* who had played *Alexander* with success, for several years, the part was given to Betterton, which, under this great disadvantage of the satiety it had given, he immediately revived with so new a lustre, that for three days together it filled the house ; and had his then-declining strength been equal to the fatigue the action gave him, it probably might have doubled its success ; an uncommon instance of the power and intrinsic merit of an actor. This I mention not only to prove what irresistible pleasure may arise from a judicious elocution, with scarcely sense to assist it, but to show you, too, that though Betterton never wanted fire and force, when his character demanded it, yet, where it was not demanded, he never prostituted his power to the low ambition of a false applause. And, further, that when, from a too advanced age, he resigned that toilsome part of *Alexander*, the play, for many years after, never was able to impose upon the public ; and I look upon his so particularly supporting the false fire and extravagancies of that character, to be a more surprising proof of his skill, than his being eminent in those of Shakspeare ; because there, truth and nature coming to his assistance, he had not the same difficulties to combat, and, consequently, we must be less amazed at his success, where we are more able to account for it.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary power he showed in blowing *Alexander* once more into a blaze of admiration, Betterton had so just a sense of what was true or false applause, that I have heard him say, he never thought any

\* See a subsequent page.

kind of it equal to an attentive silence; that there were many ways of deceiving an audience into a loud one, but to keep them hushed and quiet, was an applause which only truth and merit could arrive at: of which art, there never was an equal master to himself. From these various excellencies, he had so full a possession of the esteem and regard of his auditors, that upon his entrance into every scene, he seemed to seize upon the eyes and ears of the giddy and inadvertent. To have talked or looked another way, would then have been thought insensibility or ignorance. In all his soliloquies of moment, the strong intelligence of his attitude and aspect drew you into such an impatient gaze, and eager expectation, that you almost imbibed the sentiment with your eye, before the ear could reach it.

As Betterton is the centre to which all my observations upon action tend, you will give me leave, under his character, to enlarge upon that head. In the just delivery of poetical numbers, particularly where the sentiments are pathetic, it is scarce credible upon how minute an article of sound depends their greatest beauty or inaffection. The voice of a singer is not more strictly tied to time and tune, than that of an actor in theatrical elocution: the least syllable too long, or too slightly dwelt upon in a period, depreciates it to nothing; which very syllable, if rightly touched, shall, like the heightening stroke of light from a master's pencil, give life and spirit to the whole. I never heard a line in tragedy come from Betterton, wherein my judgment, my ear, and my imagination, were not fully satisfied; which, since his time, I cannot equally say of any one actor whatsoever: not but it is possible to be much his inferior, with great excellencies; which I shall observe in another place. Had it been practicable to have tied down the clattering hands of all the ill judges who were commonly the majority

of an audience, to what amazing perfection might the English theatre have arrived, with so just an actor as Betterton at the head of it ! If what was truth only could have been applauded, how many noisy actors had shook their plumes with shame, who, from the injudicious approbation of the multitude, have bawled and strutted in the place of merit ! If, therefore, the bare speaking voice has such allurements in it, how much less ought we to wonder, however we may lament, that the sweeter notes of vocal music should so have captivated even the politer world, into an apostasy from sense, to an idolatry of sound ? Let us inquire from whence this enchantment rises. I am afraid it may be too naturally accounted for : for when we complain that the finest music, purchased at such vast expense, is so often thrown away upon the most miserable poetry, we seem not to consider, that when the movement of the air, and tone of the voice, are exquisitely harmonious, though we regard not one word of what we hear, yet the power of the melody is so busy in the heart, that we naturally annex ideas to it of our own creation, and, in some sort, become ourselves the poet to the composer. And what poet is so dull as not to be charmed with the child of his own fancy ? So that there is even a kind of language in agreeable sounds, which, like the aspect of beauty, without words speaks and plays with the imagination. While this taste, therefore, is so naturally prevalent, I doubt to propose remedies for it, were but giving laws to the winds, or advice to <sup>the</sup> innamoratos : and however gravely we may assert, that profit ought always to be inseparable from the delight of the theatre,—nay, admitting that the pleasure would be heightened by the uniting them, yet, while instruction is so little the concern of the auditor, how can we hope that so choice a commodity will come to a market where there is so seldom a demand for it ?

It is not to the actor, therefore, but to the vitiated and

low taste of the spectator, that the corruptions of the stage, of what kind soever, have been owing. If the public, by whom they must live, had spirit enough to discountenance, and declare against all the trash and fopperies they have been so frequently fond of, both the actors and the authors, to the best of their power, must naturally have served their daily table, with sound and wholesome diet.—But I have not yet done with my **article** of elocution. \*

As we have sometimes great composers of music, who cannot sing, we have as frequently great writers that cannot read; and though, without the nicest ear, no man can be master of poetical numbers, yet the best ear in the world will not always enable him to pronounce them. Of this truth, Dryden, our first great master of verse and harmony, was a strong instance. When he brought his play of “*Amphytrion*” to the stage,\* I heard him give it his first reading to the actors, in which, though, it is true, he delivered the plain sense of every period, yet the whole was in so cold, so flat, and unaffected a manner, that I am afraid of not being believed, when I affirm it.

On the contrary, Lee, far his inferior in poetry, was so pathetic a reader of his own scenes, that I have been informed, by an actor who was present, that while Lee was reading to Major Mohun, at a rehearsal, Mohun, in the warmth of his admiration, threw down his part, and said, “Unless I were able to play it, as well as you read it, to what purpose should I undertake it?” And yet this very author, whose elocution raised such admiration in so capital an actor, when he attempted to be an actor himself, soon quitted the stage, in an honest despair of ever making any profitable figure there.† From all this I would infer, that

\* In the year 1690.

† It would almost appear from this, that Lee’s attempt on the

let our conception of what we are to speak, be ever so just, and the ear ever so true, yet, when we are to deliver it to an audience,—I will leave fear out of the question,—there must go along with the whole, a natural freedom, and becoming grace, which is easier to conceive than describe: for without this inexpressible somewhat, the performance will come out oddly disguised, or, somewhere defectively, unsurprising to the hearer. Of this defect, too, I will give you yet a stranger instance, which you will allow fear could not be the occasion of. If you remember Estcourt,\* you must

stage had been made subsequent to his appearance in the capacity of a writer. But this is not the fact, for his first play(1) was produced in 1675, and he had played *Duncan*, in D'Avenant's alteration of "*Macbeth*," three years before; so that, instead of being tempted to make his débüt as an actor, in consequence of Mohun's encouragement, it is more plausible to presume that his demerits and bad fortune as a player, induced him to take up the trade of dramatic composition.

There is a striking coincidence between the fate of Lee and of Otway, who both became authors for the stage in consequence of their unsuccessful efforts on it. Both began by writing in rhyme, and deserted it, much to the advantage of their reputation, for blank-verse; both were reduced, from voluntary dissipation, to miserable indigence; and both died, at almost the same age, within about five years of each other, in a state of starvation, obscurity, despair, and disgrace.

\* Richard Estcourt, according to the biographical notice of Chetwood,(1\*) was born at Tewksbury, in Glostershire, in the

(1) "*Nero, Emperor of Rome.*"

(1\*) See "*General History of the Stage*," page 140, 1749, in which Mr. Chetwood, by medium of the following note, communicates the source of his information:—

"The first account of this eminent performer I had from the late Mr. John Boman, an actor more than half an age on the London theatres."

Notwithstanding the explicitness of this declaration, it is suggested in the

have known that he was long enough upon the stage, not to be under the least restraint from fear, in his performance.

year 1668, and received a competent education at the Latin grammar-school of his native town. Influenced by an early attachment to the stage, he left his father's house, in the fifteenth year of his age, with an itinerant company, and on reaching Worcester, to elude the possibility of detection, made his first appearance as *Roxana*, in the "*Rival Queens*." Having received a correct intimation of this theatrical purpose, his father sent to secure the fugitive, who slipped away in a suit of woman's clothes, borrowed from one of his kind-hearted companions, and travelled to Chip-ping-Norton, a distance of five-and-twenty miles, in the course of the day. On arriving at the inn, beds were so scarce, that he was invited to partake of the daughter's, behind the bar, to which, when its fair occupant resorted, she found him in a sound sleep, but observing a shirt instead of a shift, she began to suspect her fellow-lodger's identity. A scrupulous examination of his remaining apparel confirmed this eventful doubt, in consequence of which she alarmed the people of the house, and awakened her drowsy companion. The horse-pond was at first proposed as a salutary corrective for his deception, till Estcourt avowed the motives that had occasioned it, and a traveller from Tewksbury, being by chance at the inn, corroborated his story. In two days his customary clothes were brought him from Worcester, by a person in whose charge he returned to his father.

To prevent such excursions for the future, he was quickly carried up to London, and apprenticed to an apothecary in Hatton-garden, with whom, according to some authorities,(2) he continued till the expiration of his indentures, and duly entered into business; which, either from want of liking or success, he soon afterwards re-

"*Biographia Dramatica*," that Chetwood, in recording these particulars of Estcourt, might have had them "from his own mouth." So much for the diligent investigation of the last editor!

(2) Giles Jacob.

This man was so amazing and extraordinary a mimic, that no man or woman, from the coquette to the privy counsel-

nounced, and returned to his favourite avocation.(3) Chetwood, on the contrary, asserts that he broke away from his master's authority, and after strolling about England for two years, went over to Dublin, where his performances were sanctioned by ardent and universal applause.

About the opening of the seventeenth century, Mr. Estcourt was engaged at Drury-lane Theatre, where he made his débüt as *Dominic*, in the "Spanish Friar," and established his efforts, it is said, by a close imitation of Leigh,(4) the original possessor of that

(3) This account, though generally rejected, appears to me more deserving of credit than Chetwood's notoriously neglectful habits, in gleanings intelligence, or making assertion. If Estcourt ran away from the pharmacoplist with all the celerity imputed by his biographer, he could not have been above fifteen or sixteen years old at the time he resumed his itinerant excursions, and yet we find him in Dublin, at the age of one-and-thirty, playing characters that required but little ability, and conferred even less importance.\* For these reasons, I am inclined to think that a considerable lapse, as accounted for above, occurred between the relinquishment and resumption of his theatrical pursuits. On a further consultation of the "Tattler," I find the following passage, which appears to put the fact of Estcourt's having practised as an apothecary, beyond the reach of future contention:—

"The mention of this person,† who is a great wit, and a great cripple, puts me in mind of Mr. Estcourt, who is under the same circumstances. *He was formerly my apothecary*, and being at present disabled by the gout and stone, I must recommend him to the public on Thursday next; that admirable play of Ben Jonson's called the "Silent Woman," being appointed to be acted for his benefit. It would be indecent for me to appear twice in a season at these ludicrous diversions; but as I always give my man and my maid one day in the year, I shall allow them this, and am promised by Mr. Estcourt, my ingenious apothecary, that they shall have a place kept for them in the first row of the middle gallery."—Tuesday, February 7, 1709.

(4) Now, admitting the correctness of this criticism, if Estcourt had been "uninterruptedly absent" from the English metropolis, since his boyhood, till

\* He played but secondary parts in Sir George Etherege's three comedies, to Booth, who joined the Dublin company in 1698, and left it in 1700.

† Pasquin, the maimed statue at Rome.

for, ever moved or spoke before him, but he could carry their voice, look, mien, and motion, instantly into another

part. In the year 1705, such was his merit or reputation, that Farquhar selected him for *Sergeant Kite*,<sup>(5)</sup> in the "Recruiting Officer," a character to which Downs has alluded in terms of unqualified praise.<sup>(6)</sup> It is asserted in the "Biographia Dramatica," that Mr. Estcourt was "mostly indebted for applause to his powers of mimicry, which he was inimitable; and which not only at times afforded him opportunities of appearing a much better actor than he really was,—by enabling him to copy very exactly several performers of capital merit, whose manner he remembered and assumed,—but also, by recommending him to a very numerous acquaintance in private life, secured him an indulgence for faults in his public profession, that he might otherwise, perhaps, never have been pardoned." As if an actor, in defiance of peculiar incapacity, associated reputation, and public disgust, could maintain, for twelve successive years, the very highest station in the Drury-lane company, attainable by talents, such as he was only flattered with possessing! Upon this subject, however, we may quote the re-

the date of this début, how could he have acquired this brilliant imitation of Leigh, who died in December, 1692,—about ten years before the period of his appearance?

(5) He had previously been intrusted with *Pounce*, in Steele's "Tender Husband;" 1to, 1703.

(6) "Mr. Estcourt, histrionatus. He has the honour,—Nature enduing him with an easy, free, unaffected mode of elocution,—in comedy always to lætificate his audience, especially quality; witness *Sergeant Kite*. He is not excellent only in that, but a superlative mimic."

This commendation from an impartial and practised observer, must go far to refute the charge against its subject, of stiff, scrupulous, and unbending mimicry.

Mr. Chetwood has also furnished the following curious anecdote in connection with this part:—

"Mr. Estcourt was the original *Sergeant Kite*, and every night of performance entertained the audience with a variety of little catches and flights of humour, that pleased all but his critics."



company: I have heard him make long harangues, and form various arguments, even in the manner of thinking,\*

marks of a candid and discerning writer, who has done ample justice to the estimation in which Estcourt stood, by vindicating his abilities against the mistake, or malevolence, that has ventured to asperse it:

“With respect to his stage abilities, Colley Cibber speaks of them, in his ‘Apology,’ but slightly. He confesses, indeed, that Estcourt understood a character well, though he had not, he said, acquired the art to do justice to it in representation; he instances, particularly, *Falstaff*. But Cibber and the public seemed widely to have differed; for Estcourt’s name is often placed in the bills for characters of consequence, at a time, too, when Cibber was a manager of the theatre. Nay, we see that such was the confidence of the directors of the stage in his powers to please the public, that Cibber, who afterwards played *Bays*, contented himself, during the life of Estcourt, with the inferior part of *Prince Volscius*.(7)

(7) “There cannot be a stronger proof of the old custom of distributing the parts in a play according to the strength of the company, before the introduction of those exotics, the pantomimes, than the following bill of theatrical fare, which I produce from the first edition of the ‘Spectator,’ published in numbers:—

#### THE REHEARSAL.

|                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Bays</i> , .....            | Mr. Estcourt.   |
| <i>Johnson</i> , .....         | Mr. Wilks.      |
| <i>Smith</i> , .....           | Mr. Mills.      |
| <i>Prettyman</i> , .....       | Mr. Powel.      |
| <i>Volscius</i> , .....        | Mr. Cibber.     |
| <i>Kings of Brentford</i> , .. | { Mr. Bullock.  |
|                                | { Mr. Bowen.    |
| <i>Gentleman-Usher</i> , ..... | Mr. Pinkethman. |
| <i>Physician</i> , .....       | Mr. Cross.      |
| <i>Tom Thimble</i> , ...       | Mr. Dogget.     |
| <i>Fisherman</i> , .....       | Mr. Johnson.    |
| <i>Pallas</i> , .....          | Mr. Bullock.    |
| <i>Heigh-ho!</i> .....         | Mr. Norris.     |

Davies’s “Dramatic Miscellanies;” vol. 3, p. 291.

of an eminent pleader at the bar, with every the least article and singularity of his utterance so perfectly imitated,

Cibber, I doubt not, mixed a degree of envy in his criticism. Of a player's merits the public is a fairer judge than the most enlightened of his own profession."

That Estcourt was happy in a "very numerous acquaintance," there is no reason to conceal or deny. He was remarkable for the promptitude of his wit, and the permanence of his pleasantry, qualifications that recommended him to the most cordial intercourse with Addison, Steele, Parnelle,(8) and other choice spirits of the age, who enjoyed the variety of his talents, and acknowledged the goodness of his heart. He was highly in favour with the great Duke of Marlborough, but those who know his grace's character, will hardly be surprised to learn that he did not improve his fortune by that dazzling distinction. Estcourt's honours, indeed, were strictly nominal, for though constituted providore of the Beef-steak Club,—an assemblage comprising the chief wits and greatest men of the nation,—he gained nothing by the office but their badge of employment,—a small golden gridiron, suspended from his neck by a bit of green riband.

If the foregoing remarks should be held sufficient to redeem his dramatic character from the obloquy with which it has so long been attended, the following anecdote will perhaps be accepted as ample evidence of his great talent for private mimicry.

Secretary Craggs, when very young, in company with some of his friends, went, with Estcourt, to Sir Godfrey Kneller's, and whispered to him that a gentleman present was able to give such a representation of many among his most powerful patrons, as would occasion the greatest surprise. Estcourt accordingly, at the artist's earnest desire, mimicked Lords Somers, Halifax, Godolphin, and others, so exactly, that Kneller was delighted, and laughed heartily at the imitations. Craggs gave a signal, as concerted, and

(8) This author has honoured him in a Bacchanalian poem, by the name of Jocus.

that he was the very *alter ipse*, scarcely to be distinguished from his original. Yet more ; I have seen, upon the mar-

Estcourt immediately mimicked Sir Godfrey himself, who cried out in a transport of ungovernable conviction, " Nay, there you are out, man ! By G—, that's not me !"(9)

About a twelvemonth before his death, having retired from the stage, Estcourt opened the Bumper tavern, in Covent-garden, and by enlarging his acquaintance, most probably shortened his days. He died in the year 1713, and was buried near his brother comedian, Jo Haynes, in the church-yard of St. Paul's, Covent-garden. The following summary of his merits, from the pen of Sir Richard Steele, appeared in the " Spectator," and confers reciprocal honour upon the one who possessed, and the other who praised its recorded virtues :

" It is certainly as great an instance of self-love to a weakness, to be impatient of being mimicked, as any that can be imagined. There were none but the vain, the formal, the proud, or those

(9) Sir Richard Steele adverts to Estcourt's surprising powers of personal imitation, under the name of Tom Mirror, too, compliments, him as the " first mimic that ever gave the beauties, as well as deformities, of the man he acted," and furnishes the following affectionate picture of that hard fate to which his peculiar excellencies were condemned;—

" You are to know, that this pantomime may be said to be a species of himself : he has no commerce with the rest of mankind, but as they are the objects of imitation ; like the Indian fowl called the mock[ing] bird, who has no note of his own, but hits every sound in the wood as soon as he hears it ; so that Mirror is at once a copy and an original. Poor Mirror's fate, as well as talent, is like that of the bird we just now spoke of : the nightingale, the linnet, the lark, are delighted with his company ; but the buzzard, the crow, and the owl, are observed to be his mortal enemies. Whenever Sophronius meets Mirror, he receives him with civility and respect, and well knows a good copy of himself can be no injury to him ; but Bathillus shuns the street where he expects to meet him ; for he that knows his every slip and look is constrained and affected, must be afraid to be rivalled in his action, and of having it discovered to be unnatural, by its being practised by another as well as himself."—" Tattler ;" Saturday, August 6, 1709.

gin of the written part of *Falstaff*, which he acted, his own notes and observations upon almost every speech of it, describing the true spirit of the humour, and with what tone of voice, look, and gesture, each of them ought to be de-

that were incapable of amending their faults, that dreaded him; to others he was in the highest degree pleasing; and I do not know any satisfaction of any indifferent kind I ever tasted so much, as having got over an impatience of my seeing myself in the air he could put me in when I have displeased him. It is indeed to his excellent talent this way, more than any philosophy I could read on the subject, that my person is very little of my care; and it is indifferent to me what is said of my shape, my air, my manner, my speech, or my address. It is to poor Estcourt I chiefly owe that I am arrived at the happiness of thinking nothing a diminution to me, but what argues a depravity of my will.

“ It has as much surprised me as any thing in nature, to have it frequently said, that he was not a good player: but that must be owing to a partiality for former actors in the parts in which he succeeded them, and judging by comparison of what was liked before, rather than by the nature of the thing. When a man of his wit and smartness could put on an utter absence of common sense in his face, as he did in the character of *Bullfinch*, in the “ Northern Lass,” and an air of insipid cunning and vivacity in the character of *Pounce*, in the “ Tender Husband,” it is folly to dispute his capacity and success, as he was an actor.

“ Poor Estcourt ! let the vain and proud be at rest ; they will no more disturb their admiration of their dear selves, and thou art no longer to drudge in raising the mirth of stupids, who know nothing of thy merit, for thy maintenance.”

\* “ What was peculiarly excellent in this memorable companion was, that, in the accounts he gave of persons and sentiments, he did not only hit the figure of their faces, and manner of their gestures, but he would, in his narrations, fall into their way of thinking.”—“ Spectator ;” No. 468.

*livered. Yet in his execution upon the stage, he seemed to have lost all those just ideas he had formed of it, and, almost through the character, laboured under a heavy load of flatness: in a word, with all his skill in mimicry, and knowledge of what ought to be done, he never, upon the stage, could bring it truly into practice, but was upon the whole, a languid, unaffecting actor. After I have shown you so many necessary qualifications, not one of which can be spared in true theatrical elocution, and have at the same time proved, that with the assistance of them all united, the whole may still come forth defective; what talents shall we say will infallibly form an actor? This, I confess, is one of nature's secrets, too deep for me to dive into; let us content ourselves, therefore, with affirming, that genius, which nature only gives, only can complete him. This genius, then, was so strong in Betterton, that it shone out in every speech and motion of him. Yet voice and person are such necessary supports to it, that, by the multitude, they have been preferred to genius itself, or at least often mistaken for it. Betterton had a voice of that kind, which gave more spirit to terror, than to the softer passions; of more strength than melody. The rage and jealousy of *Othello*, became him better than the sighs and tenderness of *Castalio*: for though in *Castalio* he only excelled others, in *Othello* he excelled himself; which you will easily believe, when you consider that, in spite of his complexion, *Othello* has more natural beauties than the best actor can find in all the magazine of poetry, to animate his power, and delight his judgment with.*

The person of this excellent actor was suitable to his voice; more manly than sweet; not exceeding the middle stature; inclining to the corpulent; of a serious and penetrating aspect; his limbs nearer the athletic than the delicate proportion; yet, however formed, there arose from the

*harmony of the whole a commanding mien of majesty, which the fairer-faced, or, as Shakspeare calls them, the curled darlings of his time, ever wanted something to be equal masters of. There was some years ago to be had, almost in every print-shop, a mezzotinto, from Kneller, extremely like him.\**

\* The following picture of Mr. Betterton's person has been drawn by Antony Aston, in his "Brief Supplement," to this "Apology:"

"Mr. Betterton, although a superlative good actor, laboured under an ill figure, being clumsily made, having a great head, a short thick neck, stooped in the shoulders, and had fat short arms, which he rarely lifted higher than his stomach. His left hand frequently lodged in his breast, between his coat and waistcoat, while with his right he prepared his speech. His actions were few, but just. He had little eyes and a broad face, [was] a little pock-fretten, [and had] a corpulent body and thick legs, with large feet. He was better to meet than to follow; for his aspect was serious, venerable, and majestic; in his latter time a little paralytic. His voice was low and grumbling, yet he could tune it by an artful climax, which enforced universal attention, even from the fops and orange-girls. He was incapable of dancing, even in a country-dance; as was Mrs. Barry: but their good qualities were more than equal to their deficiencies."

The character of Tony Aston,—so notorious for his frauds, ignorance, and audacity,—is sufficiently established to exonerate this philippic against Cibber's assertions from minute exposure or momentary reliance. Let the following instance of his sharpening dexterity, as related by Chetwood, convince the impartial reader of his fitness for any task of the most daring or dirty nature:

"His finances, like those of kingdoms, were sometimes at the tide of flood, and as often at low ebb. In one, where his stream had left the channel dry, yet ready to launch out on a trading voyage without a cargo, or provision, he called up his landlord,

In all I have said of Betterton, I confine myself to the time of his strength, and highest power in action, that you may *make allowances from what he was able to execute at fifty, to what you might have seen of him at past seventy; for though to the last he was without his equal, he might not then be equal to his former self; yet so far was he from*

to whom there was something due, told him of his losses in his present voyage, and being sent for to another place, desired he would lend him a small sum upon his wardrobe, (which he showed him in a large box,) ten times the value of the debt owing, or the sum borrowed. The honest landlord, seeing a proper security, easily complied, gave him the sum demanded, locked up the trunk, put the key in his pocket, and retired. But as no vessel can make a voyage without sails, and other proper materials, he had contrived a false bottom to this great box, took out the stuffing, and by degrees, sent off his wardrobe by his emissaries, unperceived. And that the weight should not detect him, he filled up the void with cabbage-stalks, bricks, and stones, clothed with rags to prevent moving, when the vehicle was to be taken the next morning into the landlord's custody. Every thing succeeded to his wish, and away went Tony, but far wide of the place he mentioned to mine host. A week was the stated time of redemption, which the landlord saw elapse with infinite satisfaction, for he had a bill of sale of the contents in the trunk: he opened it with great pleasure; but when he saw the fine lining, he was motionless; like a statue carved by a bungling hand. He had recourse to revenge. A bailiff with proper directions was sent to the place mentioned; but if he had discovered the least wit in his anger, he might have thought Tony knew better than to tell him truth. I only mention this little story, to let the reader know the shifts the itinerant gentry are sometimes put to. For Tony, when his finances were in order, and cured of the consumption, honestly paid him. I have had this tale both from Tony and the landlord, who then kept the Black-boy inn, at Chelmsford, in Essex."

being ever overtaken, that for many years after his decease, I seldom saw any of his parts in Shakspeare supplied by others, but it drew from me the lamentation of *Ophelia*, upon Hamlet's being unlike what she had seen him :

—————O, woe is me,

T'havè seen what I have seen, see what I sec !

The last part this great master of his profession acted, was *Melantius*, in the “Maid's Tragedy,” for his own benefit ; when being suddenly seized by the gout, he submitted, by extraordinary applications, to have his foot so far relieved, that he might be able to walk on the stage in a slipper, rather than wholly disappoint his auditors. He was observed that day, to have exerted a more than ordinary spirit, and met with suitable applause ; but the unhappy consequence of tampering with his distemper was, that it flew into his head, and killed him in three days, I think, in the seventy-fourth year of his age.\*

\* Thomas Betterton was born in Tothill-street, Westminster, in the year 1635, his father at that time being under-cook to King Charles the First. He received the rudiments of a genteel education, and testified such a propensity to literature, that it was the steadfast intention of his family to have had him qualified for some congenial employment. This design, the confusion and violence of the times most probably prevented, though a fondness for reading induced them to consult his inclinations, and he was accordingly apprenticed to Mr. Rhodes, a respectable bookseller, residing at the Bible, in Charing-cross.

This person, who had been wardrobe-keeper to the theatre in Blackfriars, before the suppression of dramatic amusements, on General Monk's approach to London, in the year 1659, obtained a license from the local authorities to collect a company of actors, and employ them at the “Cockpit,” in Drury-lane. Here while Kynaston, his fellow-apprentice, sustained the principal female



I once thought to have filled up my work with a select dissertation upon theatrical action, but I find, by the di-

parts, Betterton was distinguished by the vigour and elegance of his manly personations. The fame of Beaumont and Fletcher was then at its zenith, and in their plays of the "Loyal Subject," and the "Mad Lover," added to "Pericles," the "Bondman," and the "Changeling," Mr. Betterton established the groundwork of his great reputation. (1)

Sir William D'Avenant having been favoured with a patent before the civil wars broke out, obtained a renewal of that royal grant upon the restoration, and in the spring of 1662, after rehearsing various plays at Apothecaries'-hall, he opened a new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, where Rhodes's comedians, with the addition of Harris, (2) and three others, were sworn before the

(1) His voice being then as audibly strong, full, and articulate, as in the prime of his acting.—"Roscius Anglicanus."

(2) Joseph Harris, an actor of amazing versatility, who is said, in Curl's "History of the Stage," to have been bred a seal-cutter, played *Alphonso*, in the "Siege of Rhodes," on his retention by Sir William D'Avenant at the theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields. His most distinguished parts, in rapid succession, were *Romeo*, *Sir Andrew Ague-cheek*, and *Cardinal Wolsey*, in the last of which, according to the rapturous eulogy of honest Downs, he acted "with such state, port, and mien," as to transcend the reputation of all preceding excellence.

Upon the death of D'Avenant, in 1668, the dominion of his company devolved upon Harris, in conjunction with the widow, and Mr. Betterton. In 1672 he had the misfortune to wound an actor, named Cademan, so severely in the eye, as to unfit him for the farther pursuit of his profession.

The talents of Harris were not confined to speaking alone, as singing was another of his qualifications, in the exercise of which he and Sandford sang a humorous epilogue to the "Man's the Master," in the characters of two itinerant vocalists. The variety of power enjoyed by Harris is calculated to excite astonishment, and from the force with which its excellence has been attested, he must have possessed the most comprehensive ability.

Owing to the total suppression of his name upon the junction of the companies, in 1682, till the appearance of "Bussy D'Ambois," as revived from Chapman by D'Urfey, in 1691, when it stood among the *dramatis personæ* for

gressions I have been tempted to make in this account of Betterton, that all I can say upon that head will naturally

Lord Chamberlain, as servants of the crown, and honoured by the sanction of the Duke of York.

Here Sir William D'Avenant produced his "Siege of Rhodes," a play in two parts, embellished with such scenery and decorations as had never been before exhibited on the boards of a British theatre. The parts were strongly cast, and this drama, assisted by its splendid appendages, was represented for twelve days, successively, with unbounded approbation.

At this period Mr. Betterton first assumed the part of *Hamlet*, deriving considerable advantage from the hints of Sir William D'Avenant, to whom the acting of Taylor, its original representative, had been formerly familiar. Downs expressly declares that this character enhanced Mr. Betterton's reputation to the utmost, and there is much collateral evidence to substantiate its brilliant superiority. (3)

*Lanoo*, Mr. Davies has conjectured that he left the stage upon this event, in offence at the arrangements made by D'Avenant and Betterton, without his privity or assent. Such a supposition is not injudicious, and if once admitted, we shall, perhaps, have reason to lament that necessity drove Harris, in distress and decay, to a resource he could only resume under circumstances of submission, despondency, and reproach.

There is an original picture of Harris, as *Wolsey*, in the collection at Strawberry-hill, which, though tintured with suitable severity, exhibits features susceptible of mild, and even comic expression.

(3) — "I was going on in reading my letter, when I was interrupted by Mr. Greenhat, who has been this evening at the play of 'Hamlet.' Mr. Bickersstaff, said he, had you been to-night at the play-house, you had seen the force of action in perfection: your admired Mr. Betterton behaved himself so well, that, though now about seventy [four], he acted youth, and by the prevalent power of proper manner, gesture, and voice, appeared through the whole drama a young man of great expectation, vivacity, and enterprise. The soliloquy, where he began the celebrated sentence of 'To be, or not to be'—the expostulation, where he explains with his mother in her closet, the noble ardour, after seeing his father's ghost, and his generous distress for the death of *Ophelia*, are each of them circumstances which dwell strongly upon the

fall in, and possibly be less tedious, if dispersed among the various characters of the particular actors, I have promised

Mr. Betterton was so favourably considered by Charles the Second, that, upon his performance of *Alvaro*, in "Love and Honour," he received that monarch's coronation-suit for the character, as a token of esteem. Public opinion kept pace with his efforts to secure it, and by evincing unparalleled talent in such diversified parts as *Mercutio*, *Sir Toby Belch*, and *Henry the Eighth*, (the last of which was adopted from his manager's remembrance of Lowin) he speedily attained to that eminence in his art, above which no human exertion can probably ascend.

At the king's especial command, it has been asserted by some of his biographers that Mr. Betterton went over to Paris to take a view of the French stage, and suggest such means as might ensure a corresponding improvement upon our own. They even go so far as to term him the first who publicly introduced our moving scenes, though Sir William D'Avenant, to whom that honour decidedly belongs, had attached them, less perfectly, perhaps, in 1658, to his "Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru."

minds of the audience, and would certainly affect their behaviour on any parallel occasions in their own lives."—"Tattler," No. 71.

"I have lately been told by a gentleman who has frequently seen Betterton perform *Hamlet*, that he observed his countenance, which was naturally ruddy and sanguine, in the scene of the third act where his father's ghost appears, through the violent and sudden emotion of amazement and horror, turn instantly, on the sight of his father's spirit, as pale as his neckcloth; when his whole body seemed to be affected with a tremor inexpressible; so that, had his father's ghost actually risen before him, he could not have been seized with more real agonies. And this was felt so strongly by the audience, that the blood seemed to shudder in their veins likewise; and they, in some measure, partook of the astonishment and horror with which they saw this excellent actor affected."—"Lick at the Laureat." 1730.

—"I have seen a pamphlet, written above forty years ago, by an intelligent man, who greatly extols the performance of Betterton in this last scene, commonly called the closet scene."—Davies's "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 112, ed. 1784.

to treat of; I shall therefore make use of those several vehicles which you will find waiting in the next chapter, to carry you through the rest of the journey, at your leisure.

By or before 1663, Mr. Betterton had married Mrs. Saunderson, a performer in the same company, of matchless merit and unsullied virtue, though that event, by the "*Biographia Dramatica*," and other incautious compilations, is referred to the year 1670. This lady, it may be remarked, was single, while denominated mistress; the appellation of miss not being made familiar to the middle classes, till after the commencement of the ensuing century.(4)

The duke's company, notwithstanding the favour and excellence to which Betterton, Harris, Smith, and other members were admitted, began to feel its want of attraction so forcibly, that Sir William D'Avenant was induced to try the effects of a new theatre, which was accordingly opened, with unparalleled magnificence, in Dorset-garden, Salisbury-court, notwithstanding an earnest opposition by the city of London, in November, 1671. Opinion, however, still inclining to their antagonists, dramatic operas were invented, and soon enabled the players at this place to achieve a triumph over merit unassisted by such expensive frivolity.

At the death of D'Avenant, on the 17th of April, 1668, Mr. Betterton succeeded to a portion of the management, and so great was the estimation in which both he and his lady were held, that in the year 1675, when a pastoral, called "*Calisto; or, the Chaste Nymph*," written by Mr. Crown, at the request of King Charles's consort, was to be performed at court by persons of the greatest distinction, they were appointed to instruct them in their respective parts. In 1682, an union was effected with the rival com-

(4) Miss was formerly understood to mean a woman of pleasure. So Dryden, in his epilogue to the "*Pilgrim*;" 1700 :

*Misses* there were, but modestly concealed.

Miss Cross, who is particularly noticed in Haynes's epilogue to Farquhar's "*Love and a Bottle*," was the first of our stage misses, and received that distinction about the year 1702.

pany, which Mr. Betterton continued to direct, till Rich, in 1690, obtained possession of the patent, and dispossessed him of importance and authority.

Exasperated by ill treatment, Mr. Betterton confederated with the principal performers to procure an independent license, which being granted by King William, they built a new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields,(5) by subscription, and opened it on the 30th of April, 1695, with Congreve's comedy of "Love for Love."

In 1697, Mr. Collier published his invective against the stage, which had so immediate an effect upon the public mind, that Betterton and Mrs. Bracegirdle were fined for uttering profane and indecent expressions. A further annoyance resulted from certain inhabitants of Lincoln's-inn-fields, who fancying themselves incommoded by the concourse of coaches which the play-house drew together, moved the court of King's-bench for its suppression; but whatever was the result of this lawsuit, the performers continued to act till their own voluntary removal.

In the meantime, the company from which Mr. Betterton had seceded, after struggling against all the evils that an obstinate, ignorant, captious, and oppressive manager could inflict, began to remove the mists of public prejudice, and obtain their due portion of applause. Many of them were much improved, and by the advantages of youth and novelty, became able to bear up against the force that Betterton had enlisted beneath his banner. Enfeebled by age and infirmity, this distinguished veteran transferred his license to Sir John Vanbrugh, who erected a handsome theatre in the Haymarket, at which, divested of influence or control, he accepted an engagement as an actor.

Mr. Betterton's salary never exceeded eighty shillings a-week, and having sustained the loss of more than £2,000,(6) by a commercial venture to the East Indies, in 1692, necessity compelled him to pursue his professional avocations. On Thursday, April

(5) Or rather, Little Lincoln's-inn-fields, as Portugal-street was then called.

(6) Gildon says, £3,000.

the 13th, 1709,(7) the play of "Love for Love" was performed for his benefit, an occasion which summoned Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Bracegirdle from their retirement, to aid this antient coadjutor by the resumption of those parts they had originally sustained. Congreve is said to have furnished a prologue, though withdrawn and never submitted to print, which was delivered by the latter lady, the former reciting an epilogue from the pen of Rowe, which remains in lasting testimony of his affectionate regard. From this address the following lines are worthy of transcription :

But since, like friends to wit, thus thron'd you meet,  
Go on, and make the generous work complete ;  
Be true to merit, and still own his cause,  
Find something for him more than bare applause.  
In just remembrance of your pleasure past,  
Be kind and give him a discharge at last ;  
In peace and ease life's remnant let him wear,  
And hang his consecrated buskin here.

This hint, however, proved unavailing, and "Old Thomas" still continued to labour, when permitted by intermissions of disease, for that subsistence his age and his services should long before have secured.

Mr. Betterton accordingly performed at intervals in the course of the ensuing winter, and on the 25th of April, 1710, was admitted to another benefit, which, with the patronage bestowed upon its predecessor, is supposed to have netted nearly £1000. Upon

(7) In No. 157 of the "Tatler," for Tuesday, April the 11, 1709, we find the following advertisement :—

"Mr. Bickerstaff, in consideration of his antient friendship, and acquaintance with Mr. Betterton, and great esteem for his merit, summons all his disciples, whether dead or living, mad or tame, toasts, smarts, dappers, pretty fellows, musicians, or scrapers, to make their appearance at the play-house in the Hay-market on Thursday next, when there will be a play acted for the benefit of the said Betterton."

In Gildon's "Life," &c. 1710, there is a copy of Rowe's "Epilogue," stated to have been spoken by Mrs. Barry, "at the Theatre Royal, in Drury-lane, April the 7th," and this mistaken date has been perpetuated by the "Biographia Dramatica."

this occasion, he was announced for his celebrated part of *Molantius*, in the "Maid's Tragedy," from the performance of which he ought, however, upon strict consideration, to have been deterred; for having been suddenly seized with the gout, a determination not to disappoint the expectancy of his friends, induced him to employ a repellatory medicine, which lessened the swelling of his feet, and permitted him to walk in slippers. He acted, accordingly, with peculiar spirit, and was received with universal applause; but such were the fatal effects of his laudable anxiety, that the distemper returned with unusual violence, ascended to his head, and terminated his existence, in three days from the date of this fatal assumption. On the 2nd of May, his remains were deposited with much form in the cloisters of Westminster-abbey, an event which Sir Richard Steele has related in the following pathetic manner:—

"Having received notice that the famous actor, Mr. Betterton, was to be interred this evening in the cloisters, near Westminster-abbey, I was resolved to walk thither, and see the last office done to a man whom I always very much admired, and from whose action I had received more strong impressions of what is great and noble in human nature, than from the arguments of the most solid philosophers, or the descriptions of the most charming poets I had ever read. As the rude and untaught multitude are no way wrought upon more effectually than by seeing public punishments and executions, so men of letters and education feel their humility most forcibly exercised, when they attend the obsequies of men who had arrived at any perfection in liberal accomplishments. Theatrical action is to be esteemed as such, except it be objected, that we cannot call that an art which cannot be attained by art. Voice, stature, motion, and other gifts, must be very bountifully bestowed by nature, or labour and industry will but push the unhappy endeavourer in that way, the further off his wishes.

"Such an actor as Mr. Betterton ought to be recorded with the same respect as Roscius among the Romans. The greatest orator has thought fit to quote his judgment, and celebrate his life. Roscius was the example to all that would form themselves into pro-

per and winning behaviour. His action was so well adapted to the sentiments he expressed, that the youth of Rome thought they wanted only to be virtuous to be as graceful in their appearance as Roscius. (8) The imagination took a lively impression of what was great and good; and they who never thought of setting up for the art of imitation, became themselves inimitable characters.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I have hardly a notion that any performer of antiquity could surpass the action of Mr. Betterton in any of the occasions in which he has appeared on our stage. The wonderful agony which he appeared in, when he examined the circumstance of the handkerchief in “*Othello*,” the mixture of love that intruded upon his mind upon the innocent answers *Desdemona* makes, (9) betrayed in his gesture such a variety and vicissitude of passions, as would admonish a man to be afraid of his own heart, and perfectly convince him, that it is to stab it, to admit that worst of daggers, jealousy. (10) Whoever reads in his closet this admirable scene, will find that he cannot, except he has as warm an imagination as Shakspeare himself, find any but dry, incoherent, and broken sentences; but a reader that has seen Betterton act it, observes there could not be a word added; that longer speeches had been unnatural, nay impossible, in *Othello's* circumstances. The charming passage in the same tragedy, where he tells the manner of winning the affection of his mistress, was urged with so moving and graceful an energy, that while I walked in the cloisters, I thought of him with the same concern as if I waited for the remains of a person who had in real life done all that I had seen him represent. The gloom of the place, and faint lights before the ceremony appeared, contributed to the melancholy disposition I was in; and I began to

(8) This assertion must be taken *cum grano salis*; but Steele's sincerity, in framing it, conveys a high compliment to Betterton's parallel value.

(9) Here is a noble hint to modern representatives of this arduous character.

(10) Sir Richard Steele, in the warmth of his deprecation, has treated jealousy as an optional attribute; but such an assumption, I believe, is equally at variance with reason and example.



be extremely afflicted that *Brutus* and *Cassius* had any difference ; that *Hotspur's* gallantry was so unfortunate ; and that the mirth and good-humour of *Falstaff* could not exempt him from the grave.

“ The mention I have here made of Mr. Betterton, for whom I had, as long as I have known any thing, a very great esteem and gratitude for the pleasure he gave me, can do him no good ; but it may possibly be of service to the unhappy woman he has left behind him, to have it known that this great tragedian was never in a scene half so moving, as the circumstances of his affairs created at his departure.(11) His wife, after the cohabitation of forty-[seven] years in the strictest amity, has long pined away with a sense of his decay, as well in his person as his little fortune ; and, in proportion to that, she has herself decayed both in her health and reason. Her husband's death, added to her age and infirmities, would certainly have determined her life, but that the greatness of her distress has been her relief, by a present deprivation of her senses. This absence of reason has been her best defence against age, sorrow, poverty, and sickness. I dwell upon this account so distinctly, in obedience to a certain great spirit, who hides her name, and has by letter applied to me to recommend to her some object of compassion, from which she may be concealed.”(12)—“ Tattler ;” No. 168 ; Thursday, May 4, 1710.

Mr. Betterton was celebrated for polite behaviour to the dramatic writers of his time, and distinguished by singular modesty, in not presuming to understand the chief points of any character

(11) These circumstances, remarks Mr. Davies, “ were reproachful to an age of which he was so great an ornament,” but such a sentiment, however humane, we cannot easily subscribe to. Mr. Betterton had accumulated a handsome property by public support, of which when misfortunes deprived him, the descendants of his early admirers contributed with very honourable ardour to cherish those exertions in which they had been permitted but slightly to participate.

(12) Here is probably an allusion to the bounty of Queen Ann, who afterwards supplied the widow with a handsome addition to her slender means of subsistence.

they offered him, till their ideas had been asked, and, if possible, adopted.(13) He is also praised in some verses published with the "State Poems," for extending pecuniary assistance to embarrassed writers, till the success of a doubtful production might enable them to remunerate their generous creditor. Indeed, Mr. Betterton's benevolence was coupled with such magnanimity, that upon the death of that unhappy friend to whose counsels his little fortune had been sacrificed, he took charge of a surviving daughter, educated her at considerable expense, and not only made her an accomplished actress, but a valuable woman.(14)

Among many testimonies of deference to his judgment, and regard for his zeal, the tributes of Dryden and Rowe have been brilliantly recorded.(15) He was naturally of a cheerful temper, with a pious reliance upon the dispensations of providence, and nothing can yield a higher idea of his great affability, than the

(13) "Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. 3, p. 399.

(14) This lady, who was remarkably handsome, married Boman, the actor.

(15) The passages here alluded to are as follows:—

"Above twelve hundred lines have been cut off from this tragedy, since it was first delivered to the actors. They were, indeed, so judiciously lopped by Mr. Betterton, to whose care and excellent action I am equally obliged, that the connexion of the story was not lost."—"Don Sebastian;" preface; 4to, 1690.

"I cannot leave 'Hamlet,' without taking notice of the advantage with which we have seen this masterpiece of Shakspeare distinguish itself upon the stage, by Mr. Betterton's fine performance of that part. A man who, though he had no other good qualities, as he has a great many, must have made his way into the esteem of all men of letters, by this only excellency. No man is better acquainted with Shakspeare's manner of expression, and indeed he has studied him so well, and is so much master of him, that whatever part of his he performs, he does it as if it had been written on purpose for him, and that the author had exactly conceived it as he plays it. I must own a particular obligation to him, for the most considerable part of the passages relating to this life, which I have here transmitted to the public, his veneration for the memory of Shakspeare having engaged him to make a journey into Warwickshire, on purpose to gather up what remains he could, of a name for which he had so great a veneration."—"Life of Shakspeare;" 1709.

effect his behaviour produced upon Pope, who must have been a mere boy, when first admitted to his society. He sat to the poet for his picture, which Pope painted in oil, (16) and so eager was the bard to perpetuate his memory, that he published a modernization of Chaucer's "Prologues," in this venerable favourite's name, though palpably the produce of his own elegant pen. (17) As an author, Mr. Betterton's labours were confined to the drama, and if his original pieces are not entitled to much praise, his alterations exhibit some judicious amendments.

(16) This curiosity, I believe, is still preserved in the Earl of Mansfield's mansion, at Caen-wood.

(17) Pope, in the postscript of a letter to Cromwell, writes thus:—

"—— This letter of death puts me in mind of poor Betterton's, over whom I would have this sentence of Tully for an epitaph, which will serve for his moral as well as his theatrical capacity :

*" Vitæ bene actæ jucundissima est recordatio."*

In another part of his correspondence, he intimates that Betterton's "remains" had been taken care of, alluding, I suppose, to this posthumous forgery.

## CHAP. V.

*The theatrical characters of the principal actors, in the year 1690, continued.—A few words to critical auditors.*

THOUGH, as I have before observed, women were not admitted to the stage till the return of King Charles, yet it could not be so suddenly supplied with them, but that there was still a necessity, for some time, to put the handsomest young men into petticoats, which Kynaston was then said to have worn with success; particularly in the part of *Ercadne*, in the “Maid’s Tragedy,” which I have heard him speak of; and which calls to my mind a ridiculous distress that arose from these sort of shifts which the stage was then put to. The king coming a little before his usual time to a tragedy, found the actors not ready to begin, when his majesty, not chusing to have as much patience as his good subjects, sent to them, to know the meaning of it; upon which the master of the company came to the box, and rightly judging that the best excuse for their default, would be the true one, fairly told his majesty, that the *Queen* was not shaved yet. The king, whose good humour loved to laugh at a jest, as well as to make one, accepted the excuse, which served to divert him, till the male queen could be effeminated. In a word, Kynaston at that time was so beautiful a youth, that the ladies of quality prided themselves in taking him with them in their coaches to Hyde Park, in his theatrical habit, after the play; which in those days they might have sufficient time to do, because

plays then were used to begin at four o'clock; the hour that people of the same rank, are now going to dinner. Of this truth, I had the curiosity to inquire, and had it confirmed from his own mouth, in his advanced age: and, indeed, to the last of him, his handsomeness was so very little abated, that even at past sixty his teeth were all sound, white, and even, as one would wish to see in a reigning toast of twenty. He had something of a formal gravity in his mien, which was attributed to the stately step he had been so early confined to, in a female decency. But even that, in characters of superiority, had its proper graces; it misbecame him not in the part of *Leon*, in Fletcher's "Rule a Wife and have a Wife," which he executed with a determined manliness and honest authority, well worth the best actor's imitation. He had a piercing eye, and in characters of heroic life, a quick imperious vivacity in his tone of voice, that painted the tyrant truly terrible. There were two plays of Dryden in which he shone with uncommon lustre: in "Aurengzebe," he played *Morat*, and in "Don Sebastian," *Muley Moloch*; in both these parts he had a fierce, lion-like majesty in his port and utterance, that gave the spectator a kind of trembling admiration.

Here I cannot help observing upon a modest mistake, which I thought the late Mr. Booth committed in his acting the part of *Morat*.\* There are in this fierce charac-

\* "The remark is just. Mr. Booth would sometimes slur over such bold sentiments so slightly delivered by the poet. As he was good-natured, and would hear each man's censure, yet reserve his judgment, I once took the liberty of observing that he had neglected, as I thought, giving that kind of spirited turn in the afore-mentioned character. He told me I was mistaken; it was not negligence, but design, made him so slightly pass over them: 'For though,' added he, 'in these places one might raise a laugh of

ter so many sentiments of avowed barbarity, insolence, and vain-glory, that they blaze even to a ludicrous lustre, and doubtless the poet intended those to make his spectators laugh, while they admired them : but Booth thought it depreciated the dignity of tragedy, to raise a smile in any part of it, and therefore covered these kind of sentiments, with a scrupulous coldness, and unmoved delivery, as if he had feared the audience might take too familiar a notice of them. In Mr. Addison's "Cato," *Syphax* has some sentiments of nearly the same nature, which I ventured to speak as I imagined Kynaston would have done, had he been then living to have stood in the same character. Mr. Addison, who had something of Mr. Booth's diffidence at the rehearsal of his play, after it was acted, came into my opinion, and owned, that even tragedy, on such particular occasions, might admit of a laugh of approbation. In Shakspeare, instances of them are frequent ; as in *Macheth*, *Hotspur*, *Richard the Third*, and *Henry the Eighth* ;\*

approbation in a few, yet there is nothing more unsafe than exciting the laugh of simpletons, who never know when or where to stop ; and as the majority are not always the wisest part of an audience, I don't chuse to run the hazard."—"Life and Character of Booth," by Theophilus Cibber.

\* Theophilus Cibber, in the tract already quoted, expressly states, that Booth "was not so scrupulously nice or timorous" in this character, as in that to which our author has invidiously referred. I shall give the passage, for its powerful antidote to Colley's venom :—

"Mr. Booth in this part, though he gave full scope to the humour, never dropped the dignity of the character. You laughed at *Henry*, but lost not your respect for him. When he appeared most 'familiar,' he was 'by no means vulgar.' The people most about him felt the ease they enjoyed was owing to his condescension : he maintained the monarch. Hans Holbein never gave a higher pic-

all which characters, though of a tragical cast, have sometimes familiar strokes in them, so highly natural to each particular disposition, that it is impossible not to be transported into an honest laughter at them : and these are those happy liberties, which though few authors are qualified to take, yet, when justly taken, may challenge a place among their greatest beauties. Now whether Dryden in his *Morat*, *feliciter audet*, or may be allowed the happiness of having hit his mark, seems not necessary to be determined by the actor ; whose business, surely, is to make the best of his author's intention, as in this part Kynaston did, doubtless not without Dryden's approbation. For these reasons, then, I thought my good friend Mr. Booth, (who certainly had many excellencies) carried his reverence for the buskin too far, in not following the bold flights of the author, with that wantonness of spirit which the nature of those sentiments demanded : for example ;—*Morat* having a criminal passion for *Indamora*, promises, at her request, for one day, to spare the life of her lover *Aurengzebe*, but not chusing to make known the real motive of his mercy, when *Nour-mahal* says to him,

'Twill not be safe to let him live an hour.

*Morat* silences her with this heroical rhodomontade :

I'll do't, to show my arbitrary power.

*Risum teneatis?* It was impossible not to laugh, and reasonably, too, when this line came out of the mouth of

ture of him than did the actor, (Booth) in his representation. When angry, his eye spoke majestic terror ; the noblest and the bravest of his courtiers were awe-struck : he gave you the full idea of that arbitrary prince, who thought himself born to be obeyed ; the boldest dared not to dispute his commands ; he appeared to claim a right divine to exert the power he imperiously assumed." ✓

Kynaston, with the stern and haughty look that attended it. But above this tyrannical, tumid superiority of character, there is a grave and rational majesty in Shakspeare's *Henry the Fourth*, which though not so glaring to the vulgar eye, requires thrice the skill and grace, to become and support. Of this real majesty Kynaston was entirely master ; here every sentiment came from him as if it had been his own, as if he had himself, that instant, conceived it, as if he had lost the player, and were the real king he personated,—a perfection so rarely found, that very often, in actors of good repute, a certain vacancy of look, inanity of voice, or superfluous gesture, shall unmask the man to the judicious spectator ; who, from the least of those errors, plainly sees the whole but a lesson given him to be got by heart, from some great author, whose sense is deeper than the repeater's understanding. This true majesty Kynaston had so entire a command of, that when he whispered the following plain line to *Hotspur*,

Send us your prisoners, or you'll hear of it !

he conveyed a more terrible menace in it than the loudest intemperance of voice could swell to. But let the bold imitator beware, for without the look and just elocution that waited on it, an attempt of the same nature may fall to nothing.

But the dignity of this character appeared in Kynaston still more shining in the private scene between the *King* and the *Prince*, his son : there you saw majesty in that sort of grief which only majesty could feel ; there the paternal concern for the errors of the son made the monarch more revered and dreaded : his reproaches so just, yet so unmingled with anger, (and therefore the more piercing) opening, as it were, the arms of nature with a secret wish that filial duty, and penitence awaked, might fall into them with grace and honour. In this affecting scene I



thought Kynaston showed his most masterly strokes of nature; expressing all the various emotions of the heart with the same force, dignity, and feeling they are written; adding to the whole that peculiar and becoming grace, which the best writer cannot inspire into any actor that is not born with it. What made the merit of this actor, and that of Betterton, more surprising, was, that though they both observed the rules of truth and nature, they were each as different in their manner of acting, as in their personal form and features. But Kynaston staid too long upon the stage; till his memory and spirit began to fail him. I shall not, therefore, say anything of his imperfections, which, at that time, were visibly not his own, but the effects of decaying nature.\*

\* Edward Kynaston made his first appearance in 1659, at the "Cockpit" in Drury-lane, under the management of Rhodes, to whom, in his trade of bookselling, he had previously been apprenticed. Here he took the lead in personating female parts, (1) among which he sustained *Calis*, in the "Mad Lover;" *Ismena*, in the "Maid in the Mill;" the heroine of Sir John Suckling's "Aglaura;" *Arthiope*, in the "Unfortunate Lovers;" and *Evadne*, in the "Maid's Tragedy." The three last of these parts have been distinguished by Downs and our author as the best of his efforts, and being then but a "mannish youth," he made a suitable representative of feminine beauty. Kynaston's *forte*, at this period, appears to have consisted in moving compassion and pity, "in which," says old Downs, "it has since been disputable among the judicious, whether any woman that succeeded him so sensibly touched the audience as he."

At the restoration, when his majesty's servants re-opened the "Red Bull" playhouse, in St. John-street, next shifted to Gibbons's tennis-court, in Clare-market, and finally settled, in 1663, at their

(1) Gildon's "Life of Betterton."

Mountfort, a younger man by twenty years, and at this time in his highest reputation, was an actor of a very dif-

new theatre in Drury-lane, Kynaston was admitted to their ranks, and played *Peregrine*, in Jonson's comedy of the "Fox." He also held *Sir Dauphine*, a minor personage, in the same actor's "Silent Woman," and soon after succeeded to *Otto*, in the "Duke of Normandy," a part which was followed by others of variety and importance.

In derogation of Cibber's panegyric, we are assured by Davies, upon the authority of some old comedians, (2) that, from his juvenile familiarity with female characters, Kynaston contracted some disagreeable tones in speaking, which resembled the whine or cant that genuine taste has at all times been impelled to explode. When George Powel was once discharging the intemperance of a recent debauch from his stomach, Kynaston asked him if he still felt sick. "How is it possible to be otherwise," said Powel, "when I hear you speak?" Much as Kynaston, however, might have been affected by the peculiarities of early practice, we cannot consent, upon evidence such as this, to rob him of the laurels that have sprung from respectable testimony.

On the 14th of October, 1681, Kynaston, in conjunction with Hart, conveyed over to Dr. D'Avenant, Betterton, and Smith, all right and title to such property as he possessed in Drury-lane theatre; on consideration of receiving five shillings for every day upon which the duke's company should act at Dorset-garden, or elsewhere. He engaged, if possible, to break from his alliance with the king's company, to act at the duke's house, in the event of which his pension was to cease upon a weekly payment of £3; and joined with Hart in a promise to enforce Mr. Killegrew's consent to this compact, if necessary, by an action at law, for the expenses of which they were also made responsible.

Kynaston's first part, after this famous union, was *Maximus*, in

(2) "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 337.

ferent style. Of person he was tall, well-made, fair, and of an agreeable aspect ; his voice clear, full, and melodious : in tragedy he was the most affecting lover within my memory. His addresses had a resistless recommendation from

Lord Rochester's alteration of "Valentinian." In 1695 he followed the fortunes of Betterton to Lincoln's-inn-fields, and supported a considerable character in John Banks's "Cyrus the Great," produced the year after this removal. The time of his retirement is not known, but it appears from our author that he continued upon the stage till his memory and spirit both began to fail him. He had left it, however, before 1706, when Betterton and Underhill have been specified by Downs, as "being the only remains of the Duke of York's servants," at that time before the public. Kynaston died wealthy, and was buried in the church-yard of St. Paul's, Covent-garden.

Kynaston bore a great resemblance to the noted Sir Charles Sidley, a similitude of which he was so proud, that he endeavoured to display it by the most particular expedients. On one occasion, he got a suit of laced clothes made in imitation of the baronet's, and appearing publicly in it, Sir Charles, whose wit very seldom atoned for his ill-nature, punished this vain propensity in his usual mischievous manner. He hired a bravo to accost Kynaston in the Park, one day when he wore his finery, pick a quarrel with him on account of a pretended affront from his prototype, and beat him unmercifully. This scheme was duly put in practice, and though Kynaston protested that he was not the person his antagonist took him for, the ruffian redoubled his blows, on account of what he affected to consider his scandalous falsehood. When Sir Charles Sidley was remonstrated with upon the cruelty of this transaction, he told the actor's friends that their pity was misplaced, for that Kynaston had not suffered so much in his bones as *he* had in his character, the whole town believing that it was he who had undergone the disgrace of this chastisement.

the very tone of his voice, which gave his words such softness, that, as Dryden says,

——— Like flakes of feather'd snow,

They melted as they fell !\*

All this he particularly verified in that scene of *Alexander*, where the hero throws himself at the feet of *Statira* for pardon of his past infidelities. There we saw the great, the tender, the penitent, the despairing, the transported, and the amiable, in the highest perfection. In comedy, he gave the truest life to what we call the Fine Gentleman ; his spirit shone the brighter for being polished with decency : in scenes of gaiety, he never broke into the regard that was due to the presence of equal, or superior characters, though inferior actors played them : he filled the stage, not by elbowing, and crossing it before others, or disconcerting their action, but by surpassing them in true and masterly touches of nature. He never laughed at his own jest, unless the point of his raillery upon another required it. He had a particular talent in giving life to *bons mots* and *repartees* : the wit of the poet seemed always to come from him *extempore*, and sharpened into more wit, from his brilliant manner of delivering it : he had himself a good share of it, or what is equal to it, so lively a pleasantness of humour, that when either of these fell into his hands upon the stage, he wantoned with them to the highest delight of his auditors. The agreeable was so natural to him, that even in that dissolute character of the “ *Rover*,”† he seemed to wash off the guilt from vice, and gave it

\* “ *Spanish Friar*,” *a. 2, sc. 2.*

† Acted at the Duke’s theatre, and published, in two parts, 4to, 1677, 1681. Both comedies are full of bustle and intrigue, and have been founded by Mrs. Aphra Behn upon Thomas Killegrew’s “ *Thomaso*.”

charms and merit. For, though it may be a reproach to the poet to draw such characters, not only unpunished, but rewarded, the actor may still be allowed his due praise in his excellent performance. And this is a distinction which, when this comedy was acted at Whitehall, King William's queen, Mary, was pleased to make in favour of Mountfort, notwithstanding her disapprobation of the play.

He had, besides all this, a variety in his genius which few capital actors have shown, or, perhaps, have thought it any addition to their merit to arrive at. He could entirely change himself; could at once throw off the man of sense, for the brisk vain, rude, and lively coxcomb, the false, flashy pretender to wit, and the dupe of his own sufficiency: of this he gave a delightful instance in the character of *Sparkish*, in Wycherley's "Country Wife." In that of *Sir Courtly Nice*, his excellence was still greater: there his whole man, voice, mien, and gesture, was no longer Mountfort, but another person. There, the insipid, soft civility, the elegant and formal mien; the drawling delicacy of voice; the stately flatness of his address, and the empty eminence of his attitudes, were so nicely observed and guarded by him, that had he not been an entire master of nature, had he not kept his judgment, as it were, a sentinel upon himself, not to admit the least likeness of what he used to be, to enter into any part of his performance, he could not possibly have so completely finished it. If, some years after the death of Mountfort, I myself had any success in either of these characters, I must pay the debt I owe to his memory, in confessing the advantages I received from the just idea and strong impression he had given me, from his acting them. Had he been remembered when I first attempted them, my defects would have been more easily discovered, and, consequently, my favourable reception in them must have been very much, and justly,

abated. If it could be remembered how much he had the advantage of me in voice and person, I could not, here, be suspected of an affected modesty, or of overvaluing his excellence: for he sung a clear counter-tenor, and had a melodious, warbling throat, which could not but set off the last scene of *Sir Courtly* with an uncommon happiness; which I, alas! could only struggle through, with the faint excuses, and real confidence of a fine singer, under the imperfection of a feigned and screaming treble, which at best could only show you what I would have done, had nature been more favourable to me.

This excellent actor was cut off by a tragical death, in the thirty-third year of his age, generally lamented by his friends, and all lovers of the theatre. The particular accidents that attended his fall are to be found at large in the trial of the Lord Mohun, printed among those of the State, in folio.\*

\* William Mountfort, according to Cibber's estimate, was born in 1660, (1) and having, I suppose, joined the king's company at a very early age, about the year 1682, "grew," in the words of old Downs, "to the maturity of a good actor." (2) At this period he certainly followed the fortunes of Mohun, (3) but was readmitted to Drury-lane theatre, now occupied by the united company, and sustained *Alfonso Corso*, in the "Duke of Guise," in 1683. His rise was so rapid, that in 1685 we find him selected for the hero of Crowne's "Sir Courtly Nice," "which," says Downs,

(1) The "Biographia Dramatica" says 1659, but as Mountfort died in December, 1692, and had only *entered* on his thirty-third year, the time I have assigned for his birth is most probably correct.

(2) "Roscius Anglicanus." p. 39, ed. 1708.

(3) I am borne out in this belief by the fact of Mrs. Mountfort having been among the seceders.

Sandford might properly be termed the Spagnolet of the theatre, an excellent actor in disagreeable characters ; for,

“ was so *nicely* performed,” that none of his successors, but Colley Cibber, could equal him. Perhaps the last new character assumed by Mountfort was *Cleanthes*, in Dryden’s “ *Cleomenes*,” a play to which he spoke the prologue.

It is said in the “ *Biographia Dramatica*,” a book which the last editor has stripped of nearly all its claims to consultation, that Mountfort’s family was settled in Staffordshire ; and Jacob informs us that he was entertained for some time in the establishment of Lord Chancellor Jefferies, on the fall of whom he resumed his professional pursuits, and wrote half a dozen dramatic pieces. His merits, as an actor, are so vividly described in the text, that I can add nothing to the fulness of Mr. Cibber’s information.

I here present the reader with a narrative of those circumstances attending the death of Mountfort, which have so long been misunderstood and misrepresented.

A Captain Richard Hill had made proposals of marriage to Mrs. Bracegirdle, which were declined from what Hill appeared to consider an injurious preference for Mountfort, between whom, though a married man, and the lady, at least a platonic attachment was often thought to subsist. Enraged at Mountfort’s superior success, and affecting to treat him as the only obstacle to his wishes, Hill expressed a determination at various times, and before several persons, to be revenged upon him, and as it was proved upon the trial, coupled this threat with some of the bitterest invectives that could spring from brutal animosity. Among Hill’s associates was Lord Mohun, a peer of very dissolute manners, whose extreme youth afforded but a faint palliative for his participation in the act of violence and debauchery to which Hill resorted. This nobleman, however, who seems to have felt a chivalric devotion to the interests of his friend, engaged with Hill in a cruel and perfidious scheme for the abduction of Mrs. Bracegirdle, whom Hill proposed to carry off, violate, and afterwards marry. They arranged with

as the chief pieces of that famous painter were of human nature in pain and agony, so Sandford, upon the stage,

one Dixon, an owner of hackney carriages, to provide a coach and six horses to take them to Totteridge, and appointed him to wait with this conveyance over against the Horse-shoe tavern in Drury-lane. A small party of soldiers was also hired to assist in this notable exploit, and as Mrs. Bracegirdle, who had been supping at a Mr. Page's in Prince's-street, was going down Drury-lane, towards her lodgings in Howard-street, Strand, about ten o'clock at night, on Friday the 9th of December, 1692, two of these soldiers pulled her away from Mr. Page, who was attending her home, nearly knocked her mother down, and tried to lift her into the vehicle. Her mother, upon whom the blow given by these ruffians had providentially made but a short impression, hung very obstinately about her neck, and prevented the success of their endeavours. While Mr. Page was calling loudly for assistance, Hill ran at him with his sword drawn, and again endeavoured to get Mrs. Bracegirdle into the coach, a task he was hindered from accomplishing, by the alarm that Page had successfully given. Company came up, on which Hill insisted on seeing Mrs. Bracegirdle home, and actually led her by the hand to the house in which she resided. Lord Mohun, who during this scuffle was seated quietly in the coach, joined Hill in Howard-street, the soldiers having been previously dismissed, and there they paraded, with their swords drawn, for about an hour and a half, before Mrs. Bracegirdle's door. Hill's scabbard, it ought to be remarked, was clearly proved to have been lost during the scuffle in Drury-lane, and Lord Mohun, when challenged by the watch, not only sheathed his weapon, but offered to surrender it. These were strong points at least in his lordship's favour, and deserve to be noted, because the prescriptive assertion that Mountfort was treacherously killed, is weakened by the establishment of those facts. Mrs. Brown, the mistress of the house where Mrs. Bracegirdle lodged, went out on her arrival, to expostulate with Lord Mohun and his confederate,



was generally as flagitious as a *Creon*,\* a *Maligni*,† an *Iago*,‡ or a *Machiavel*,§ could make him. The painter,

and after exchanging a few words of no particular importance, dispatched her maid servant to Mountfort's house, (1) hard by in Norfolk-street, to apprise Mrs. Mountfort of the danger to which, in case of coming home, he would be subjected. Mrs. Mountfort sent in search of her husband, but without success, and the watch on going their round, between eleven and twelve o'clock, found Lord Mohun and Hill drinking wine in the street, a drawer having brought it from an adjacent tavern. At this juncture Mrs. Brown, the landlady, hearing the voices of the watch, went to the door with a design of directing them to secure both Lord Mohun and Hill, and some conversation passed upon that subject, although her directions were not obeyed. Seeing Mountfort, just as he had turned the corner into Howard-street, and was apparently coming towards her house. Mrs. Brown hurried out to meet him, and mentioned his danger, but he would not stop, so as to allow her time for the slightest communication. On gaining the spot where Lord Mohun stood, Hill being a little farther off, he saluted his lordship with great respect, and was received by him with unequivocal kindness. Lord Mohun hinted to Mountfort that he had been sent for by Mrs. Bracegirdle, in consequence of her projected seizure, a charge which Mountfort immediately denied. Lord Mohun then touched upon the affair, and Mountfort expressed a hope, with some warmth, that he would not vindicate Hill's share in the business, against which, while disclaiming any tenderness for Mrs. Bracegirdle, he protested with much asperity. Hill approached in

\* In "Œdipus."

† In the "Villain," a tragedy, by Thomas Porter, 4to. 1663.

‡ In "Othello."

§ In "Cæsar Borgia," a tragedy, by Lee.

(1) Mrs. Brown swore she went herself, but appears to have been mistaken.

'tis true, from the fire of his genius, might think the quiet objects of nature too tame for his pencil, and therefore

time to catch the substance of Mountfort's remark, and having hastily said that he could vindicate himself, gave him a blow on the ear, and at the same moment a challenge to fight. They both went from the pavement into the middle of the road, and after making two or three passes at each other, Mountfort was mortally wounded. He threw down his sword, which broke by the fall, and staggered to his own house, where Mrs. Page, who had gone to concert with Mrs. Mountfort for her husband's safety, hearing a cry of "murder" in the street, threw open the door, and received him pale, bleeding, and exhausted, in her arms. Hill fled and escaped, but Lord Mohun, having surrendered himself, was arraigned before parliament as an accomplice, on the 31st of January, 1693, and, after a laborious, patient, protracted, and impartial trial, acquitted of the crime, in which he certainly bore no conspicuous part. Mountfort languished till noon the next day, and solemnly declared, at the very point of death, that Hill stabbed him with one hand while he struck him with the other, Lord Mohun holding him in conversation when the murder was committed. From the fact, however, of Mountfort's sword being taken up unsheathed and broken, there is no doubt, without insisting upon the testimony to that effect, that he used it; and that he could have used it after receiving the desperate wound of which he died, does not appear, by his flight and exhaustion, to have been possible. Some of his fellow-players, it seems, had sifted the evidence of a material witness, the day after his death, and at this evidence they openly expressed their dissatisfaction. Mountfort, it was indisputably shown, too, *went out of the way to his own house*, in going down Howard-street at all, as he ought to have crossed it, his door being the second from the south-west corner. These circumstances will perhaps support a conjecture that some part of the odium heaped upon Lord Mohun (2) and Hill has

(2) It is remarked by a narrator of Lord Mohun's life, that imperfect edu-

chose to indulge it, in its full power, upon those of violence and horror : but poor Sandford was not the stage-villain

proceeded from the cowardice and exasperation of a timid and vindictive fraternity, coupled with the individual artifices of Mrs. Bracegirdle, to redeem a character which the real circumstances of Mountfort's death, dying as her champion, severely affected. Cibber's assurance of her purity, may merely prove the extent of his dulness or dissimulation, for on calmly reviewing this case in all its aspects, chequered as it is by Hill's impetuosity, Mrs. Bracegirdle's lewdness, and Mountfort's presumption, I cannot help inferring that he fell a victim, not unfairly, to one of those casual encounters which mark the general violence of the times. The record of his murder is therefore erroneous, and we may hope to see it amended in every future collection of theatrical lives.

cation, having lost both his parents, led him into many unlucky follies, and even criminal excesses. It might, however, have been reasonably expected, that upon his release from the imputation of Mountfort's murder, he would have abandoned his rakish courses, and cultivated the society of sober companions. But in seven years after this serious warning, he was again tried, with the Earls of Warwick and Holland, upon a charge of murder, from which, it is true, he was honourably freed by the unanimous verdict of his noble judges. This event made a proper impression upon his mind, and in a very feeling address at the bar, he proclaimed his determination of so regulating his life for the future, as to avoid the disgraceful circumstances, in which he had been repeatedly involved. True to this purpose, he applied himself sedulously to the improvement of his mind, and became an ornament to the peerage upon which he had so long been a stigma. He obtained more than one public employment, and discharged his several trusts with such talent and fidelity, as to secure the thanks of his countrymen, and the affection of his relatives. In consequence of succeeding to a handsome property left him by the will of his uncle, the Earl of Macclesfield, he was involved in a law-suit with James, Duke of Hamilton, which ended after the lapse of eleven years in a duel, the result of which was so sanguinary, that Hamilton perished on the spot, and Mohun scarcely survived his removal. This fatal affair happened on Saturday the 15th of November, 1712, and Lord Mohun's memory did not escape the accusation by which his life had twice before been tarnished. It was sworn by a person present, that one Macartney, a friend of Lord Mohun's, stabbed the Duke of Hamilton, but there, for want of stronger testimony, the accusation ended.

by choice, but from necessity; for, having a low and crooked person, such bodily defects were too strong to be admitted into great, or amiable characters; so that whenever, in any new or revived play, there was a hateful or mischievous person, Sandford was sure to have no competitor for it. Nor, indeed, (as we are not to suppose a villain or a traitor can be shown for our imitation, or not for our abhorrence) can it be doubted, but the less comely the actor's person, the fitter he may be to perform them. The spectator, too, by not being misled by a tempting form, may be less inclined to excuse the wicked or immoral views or sentiments of them. And though the hard fate of an *Ædipus*, might naturally give the humanity of an audience thrice the pleasure that could arise from the wilful wickedness of the best-acted *Creon*, yet who could say that Sandford, in such a part, was not master of as true and just action, as the best tragedian could be, whose happier person had recommended him to the virtuous hero, or any other more pleasing favourite of the imagination? In this disadvantageous light, then, stood Sandford, as an actor; admired by the judicious, while the crowd only praised him by their prejudice. And so unusual had it been to see Sandford an innocent man in a play, that whenever he was so, the spectators would hardly give him credit in so gross an improbability \* Let me give you an odd instance of it, which I heard Mountfort say was a real fact. A new play (the name of it I have forgotten) was brought upon

\* "When poor Sandford was upon the stage, I have seen him groaning upon a wheel, stuck with daggers, impaled alive, calling his executioners, with a dying voice, cruel dogs and villains, and all this to please his judicious spectators, who were wonderfully delighted with seeing a man in torment so well acted."—"Tatler," Feb. 16, 1709.

the stage, wherein Sandford happened to perform the part of an honest statesman : the pit, after they had sate three or four acts, in a quiet expectation that the well-dissembled honesty of Sandford, for such of course they concluded it, would soon be discovered, or at least, from its security, involve the actors in the play in some surprising distress or confusion, which might raise, and animate the scenes to come ; when, at last, finding no such matter, but that the catastrophe had taken quite another turn, and that Sandford was really an honest man to the end of the play, they fairly damned it, as if the author had imposed upon them the most frontless or incredible absurdity.\*

It is not improbable, but that from Sandford's so masterly personating characters of guilt, the inferior actors might think his success chiefly owing to the defects of his person ; and from thence might take occasion whenever they appeared as bravos, or murtherers, to make themselves as frightful and as inhuman figures, as possible.† In King Charles's time, this low skill was carried to such an extravagance, that the king himself, who was black-browed, and of a swarthy complexion, passed a pleasant remark, upon his observing the grim looks of the murtherers in "Macbeth ;" when, turning to his people, in the box about him, "Pray, what is the meaning," said he, "that we never see a rogue in the play, but, godsfish ! they always clap him on a black periwig, when, it is well known, one of the greatest rogues in England always wears a fair one ?" Now,

\* This anecdote has more vivacity than truth, for the audience were too much accustomed to see Sandford in parts of even a comic nature, to testify the impatience or disappointment which Mr. Cibber has described.

† This is a most ridiculous deduction, and does not deserve to be seriously refuted.

whether or no Dr. Oates, at that time, wore his own hair, I cannot be positive: or, if his majesty pointed at some greater man, then out of power, I leave those to guess at him, who may yet remember the changing complexion of his ministers. This story I had from Betterton, who was a man of veracity: and, I confess, I should have thought the king's observation a very just one, though he himself had been fair as Adonis. Nor can I, in this question, help voting with the court; for were it not too gross a weakness to employ in wicked purposes, men whose very suspected looks might be enough to betray them? Or are we to suppose it unnatural, that a murder should be thoroughly committed out of an old red coat, and a black periwig?

For my own part, I profess myself to have been an admirer of Sandford, and have often lamented that his masterly performance could not be rewarded with that applause which I saw much inferior actors met with, merely because they stood in more laudable characters. For, though it may be a merit in an audience to applaud sentiments of virtue and honour, yet there seems to be an equal justice, that no distinction should be made as to the excellence of an actor, whether in a good or evil character; since neither the vice nor the virtue of it is his own, but given him by the poet; therefore, why is not the actor who shines in either, equally commendable? No, sir; this may be reason, but that is not always a rule with us; the spectator will tell you, that when virtue is applauded he gives part of it to himself; because his applause, at the same time, lets others about him see that he himself admires it. But when a wicked action is going forward; when an *Iago* is meditating revenge and mischief; though art and nature may be equally strong in the actor, the spectator is shy of his applause, lest he should, in some sort, be looked upon as an aider or an abettor of the wickedness in view; and therefore rather chuses to rob the

actor of the praise he may merit, than give it him in a character, which he would have you see his silence modestly discourages. From the same fond principle, many actors have made it a point to be seen in parts, sometimes, even flatly written, only because they stood in the favourable light of honour and virtue.

I have formerly known an actress\* carry this theatrical prudery to such a height, that she was very near keeping herself chaste by it: her fondness for virtue on the stage, she began to think, might persuade the world that it had made an impression on her private life; and the appearance of it actually went so far, that, in an epilogue to an obscure play, the profits of which were given to her, and wherein she acted a part of impregnable chastity, she bespoke the favour of the ladies by a protestation, that, in honour of their goodness and virtue, she would dedicate her unblemished life to their example. Part of this vestal vow, I remember, was contained in the following verse:

Study to live the character I play.

But, alas! how weak are the strongest works of art, when nature besieges it! for though this good creature so far held out her distaste to mankind, that they could never reduce her to marry any one of them; yet we must own she grew, like Cæsar, greater by her fall. Her first heroic motive to a surrender was to save the life of a lover, who, in his despair, had vowed to destroy himself; with which act of mercy, in a jealous dispute once, in my hearing, she was provoked to reproach him in these very words; "Villain! did not I save your life?" The generous lover, in return to that first tender obligation, gave life to her first-born,† and that pious

\* Mrs. Rogers, the mistress of Wilks, to whom the latter part of this paragraph alludes.

† The wife of Christopher Bullock, the comedian, with whom

offspring has since raised to her memory, several innocent grand-children.

So that, as we see, it is not the hood that makes the monk, nor the veil the vestal, I am apt to think, that if the personal morals of an actor were to be weighed by his appearance on the stage, the advantage and favour, if any were due to either side, might rather incline to the traitor, than the hero; to the *Sempronius*, than the *Cato*; or to the *Syphax*, than the *Juba*; because no man can naturally desire to cover his honesty with a wicked appearance; but an ill man might possibly incline to cover his guilt with the appearance of virtue, which was the case of the frail fair one, now mentioned. But be this question decided as it may, Sandford always appeared to me the honester man, in proportion to the spirit wherewith he exposed the wicked and immoral characters he acted: for had his heart been unsound, or tainted with the least guilt of them, his conscience must, in spite of him, in any too near a resemblance of himself, have been a check upon the vivacity of his action. Sandford, therefore, might be said to have contributed his equal share, with the foremost actors, to the true and laudable use of the stage; and in this light, too, of being so frequently the object of common distaste, we may honestly style him a theatrical martyr to poetical justice: for in making vice odious, or virtue amiable, where does the merit differ? To hate the one, or love the other, are but leading steps to the same temple of fame, though at different portals.

This actor, in his manner of speaking, varied very much from those I have already mentioned. His voice had an

she married in the year 1717, and, dying in 1739, left a daughter who was united to Mr. Dyer, a respectable member of the Covent-garden company, in which, upon his demise, he was succeeded by the late Lee Lewes.



acute and piercing tone, which struck every syllable of his words distinctly upon the ear. He had likewise a peculiar skill in his look of marking out to an audience whatever he judged worth their more than ordinary notice. When he delivered a command, he would sometimes give it more force, by seeming to slight the ornament of harmony. In Dryden's plays of rhyme, he as little as possible glutted the ear with the jingle of it, rather chusing, when the sense would permit him, to lose it than to value it.

Had Sandford lived in Shakspeare's time, I am confident his judgment must have chosen him, above all other actors, to have played his *Richard the Third*: I leave his person out of the question, which, though naturally made for it, yet that would have been the least part of his recommendation. Sandford had stronger claims to it: he had sometimes an uncouth stateliness in his motion, a harsh and sullen pride of speech, a meditating brow, a stern aspect, occasionally changing into an almost ludicrous triumph over all goodness and virtue; from thence falling into the most assuasive gentleness and soothing candour of a designing heart. These, I say, must have preferred him to it; these would have been colours so essentially shining in that character, that it will be no dispraise to that great author, to say, Sandford must have shown as many masterly strokes in it, had he ever acted it, as are visible in the writing of it.

When I first brought "*Richard the Third*," with such alterations as I thought not improper, to the stage,\* Sandford was engaged in the company then acting under King William's license in Lincoln's-inn-fields; otherwise, you cannot but suppose my interest must have offered him that part. What encouraged me, therefore, to attempt it myself at the Theatre Royal, was, that I imagined I knew how

\* Acted at Drury-lane theatre, and printed, 4to. in 1700.

Sandford would have spoken every line of it : if, therefore, in any part of it I succeeded, let the merit be given to him : and how far I succeeded in that light, those only can be judges who remember him. In order, therefore, to give you a nearer idea of Sandford, you must give me leave, compelled as I am to be vain, to tell you, that the late Sir John Vanbrugh, who was an admirer of Sandford, after he had seen me act it, assured me, that he never knew any one actor so particularly profit by another, as I had done by Sandford, in *Richard the Third* : “ You have,” said he, “ his very look, gesture, gait, speech, and every motion of him, and have borrowed them all, only to serve you in that character.” If, therefore, Sir John Vanbrugh’s observation was just, they who remember me in *Richard the Third*, may have a nearer conception of Sandford, than from all the critical account I can give of him.\*

\* Samuel Sandford made his first appearance upon the stage, under D’Avenant’s authority, in the year 1663, at the time when that company was strengthened by the accession of Smith and Matthew Medbourn. The first part for which he has been mentioned by Downs, is *Sampson*, in “ *Romeo and Juliet* ;” he soon after sustained a minor part in the “ *Adventures of Five Hours*,” fol. 1663; and when D’Avenant produced his comedy of the “ *Man’s the Master*,” he and Harris sung an eccentric epilogue in the character of two street ballad-singers. Sandford was the original *Foresight*, in “ *Love for Love*,” and though Mr. Cibber has exclusively insisted upon his tragic excellence, he must have been a comedian of strong and diversified humour. When Betterton and his associates seceded to the new theatre in Lincoln’s-inn-fields, he refused to join them as a sharer, but was engaged at a salary of three pounds per week. As Sandford is not enumerated by Downs among the actors transferred to Swiney, in the latter end of 1706, when Betterton and Underhill, indeed, are mentioned as “ the only remains” of the duke’s company, it is clear he must have died during the previous six years, having been referred to by Cib-

I come now to those other men actors, who, at this time, were equally famous in the lower life of comedy; but I find myself more at a loss to give you them, in their true and proper light, than those I have already set before you. Why the tragedian warms us into joy, or admiration, or sets our eyes on flow with pity, we can easily explain to another's apprehension: but it may sometimes puzzle the gravest spectator to account for that familiar violence of laughter that shall seize him, at some particular strokes of a true comedian. How then shall I describe what a better judge might not be able to express? The rules to please the fancy cannot so easily be laid down, as those that ought to govern the judgment. The decency, too, that must be observed in tragedy, reduces, by the manner of speaking it, one actor to be much more like another, than they can or need be supposed to be in comedy: there the laws of action give them such free, and almost unlimited liberties, to play and wanton with nature, that the voice, look, and gesture of a comedian may be as various as the manners and faces of the whole of mankind are different from one another. These are the difficulties I lie under. Where I want words, therefore, to describe what I may commend, I can only hope you will give credit to my opinion: and this credit I shall most stand in need of, when I tell you, that Nokes was an actor of a quite different genius from any

ber, as exercising his profession in 1700.(1) His ancestors were long and respectably settled at Sandford, a village in Shropshire; and he seems to have prided himself, absurdly, upon the superiority of his birth.

(1) Sandford's *Iago* is adverted to in the "Tattler," No. 158, as a part in which he "very highly excelled."

There is a Thomas Sanford mentioned in the will\* of Underhill, one of Shakspeare's fellow-comedians, whom I suspect to have been the grandfather of our present subject.

\* Dated 1624

I have ever read, heard of, or seen, since or before his time ; and yet his general excellence may be comprehended in one article ; *viz.* a plain and palpable simplicity of nature, which was so utterly his own, that he was often as unaccountably diverting in his common speech, as on the stage. I saw him once, giving an account of some table-talk, to another actor behind the scenes, which a man of quality accidentally listening to, was so deceived by his manner, that he asked him, if that was a new play he was rehearsing ? It seems almost amazing that this simplicity so easy to Nokes, should never be caught by any one of his successors. Leigh and Underhill have been well copied, though not equalled by others. But not all the mimical skill of Estcourt, famed as he was for it, though he had often seen Nokes, could scarcely give us an idea of him. After this, perhaps, it will be saying less of him, when I own, that though I have still the sound of every line he spoke in my ear, which used not to be thought a bad one, yet I have often tried by myself, but in vain, to reach the least distant likeness of the *vis comica* of Nokes. Though this may seem little to his praise, it may be negatively saying a good deal of it, because I have never seen any one actor, except himself, whom I could not, at least so far, imitate, as to give you a more than tolerable notion of his manner. But Nokes was so singular a species, and was so formed by nature for the stage, that I question if beyond the trouble of getting words by heart, it ever cost him an hour's labour to arrive at that high reputation he had, and deserved.

The characters he principally shone in, were *Sir Martin Mar-all* ; *Gomez*, in the "Spanish Friar ;" *Sir Nicholas Cully*, in "Love in a Tub ;" *Barnaby Rattle*, in the "Wanton Wife ;" *Sir Davy Duncie*, in the "Soldier's Fortune ;" *Sosia*, in "Amphytrion," &c. To tell you how he acted them is beyond the reach of criticism ; but to tell

you what effect his action had upon the spectator, is not impossible ; this then is all you will expect from me, and from hence I must leave you to guess at him.

He scarcely ever made his first entrance in a play, but he was received with an involuntary applause, not of hands only, for those may be, and have often been partially prostituted, and bespoken ; but by a general laughter, which the very sight of him provoked, and nature could not resist ; yet the louder the laugh, the graver was his look upon it ; and, surely, the ridiculous solemnity of his features was enough to have set a whole bench of bishops into a titter, could he have been honoured (may it be no offence to suppose it) with such grave and right reverend auditors. In the ludicrous distresses, which, by the laws of comedy, folly is often involved in, he sunk into such a mixture of piteous pusillanimity, and a consternation so ruefully ridiculous and inconsolable, that when he had shaken you to a fatigue of laughter, it became a moot point, whether you ought not to have pitied him. When he debated any matter by himself, he would shut up his mouth with a dumb studious pout, and roll his full eye into such a vacant amazement, such a palpable ignorance of what to think of it, that his silent perplexity, which would sometimes hold him several minutes, gave your imagination as full content, as the most absurd thing he could say upon it. In the character of *Sir Martin Mar-all*, who is always committing blunders to the prejudice of his own interest, when he had brought himself to a dilemma in his affairs, by vainly proceeding upon his own head, and was afterwards afraid to look his governing servant and counsellor in the face ; what a copious and distressful harangue have I seen him make with his looks, while the house has been in one continued roar, for several minutes, before he could prevail with his courage to speak a word to him ! Then might you have, at once, read in his

face vexation—that his own measures, which he had piqued himself upon, had failed ; envy—of his servant's superior wit ; distress—to retrieve the occasion he had lost ; shame—to confess his folly ; and yet a sullen desire to be reconciled and better advised for the future. What tragedy ever showed us such a tumult of passions rising, at once, in one bosom, or what buskined hero, standing under the load of them, could have more effectually moved his spectators, by the most pathetic speech, than poor miserable Nokes did, by this silent eloquence, and piteous plight of his features ?

His person was of the middle size ; his voice clear, and audible ; his natural countenance grave, and sober ; but the moment he spoke, the settled seriousness of his features was utterly discharged, and a dry, drolling, or laughing levity took such full possession of him, that I can only refer the idea of him to your imagination. In some of his low characters, that became it, he had a shuffling shamble in his gait, with so contented an ignorance in his aspect, and an awkward absurdity in his gesture, that had you not known him, you could not have believed that, naturally, he could have had a grain of common sense. In a word, I am tempted to sum up the character of Nokes, as a comedian, in a parody of what Shakspeare's *Mark Antony* says of *Brutus*, as a hero.

His life was laughter, and the ludicrous  
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up,  
And say to all the world—This was an actor.\*

\* Robert Nokes formed part of the company collected at the "Cockpit," in 1659, and is first mentioned by Downs for *Norfolk*, in "King Henry the Eighth," some time after D'Avenant's opening in Lincoln's-inn-fields. Upon this assumption Mr. Davies (1)

(1) "Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. 1, p. 357.

Leigh was of the mercurial kind, and though not so strict an observer of nature, yet never so wanton in his per-

has expressed a very reasonable doubt, and conjectured, with much plausibility, that it was sustained by James Nokes, who supported female characters, at the same theatre, in a very creditable manner.

In Cowley's "Cutter of Coleman-street," 4to, 1663, the part of *Puny* was allotted to Nokes, whose reputation at that period appears to have been but feebly established, as the more important comic characters were intrusted to Lovel (2) and Underhill. We find the name of Nokes affixed to *Lovis*, in Etherege's "Comical Revenge," 4to, 1664, but his performance of that part, whatever merit it might have evinced, acquired no distinction. The plague then beginning to rage, theatrical exhibitions were suspended, in May, 1665, and the company ceased to act, on account of the great fire, till after Christmas, 1666, when their occupation was resumed in Lincoln's-inn-fields, and Lord Orrery produced his play of "Mr. Antony." In this piece there was an odd sort of duel between Nokes and Angel, (3) in which one was armed with a blun-

(2) Lovel was a member of the company with which Rhodes opened the "Cockpit," in 1659, and passed with Betterton, and other associates, to Sir William D'Avenant. In the spring of 1662, we find his name for *Polonius*; in 1663, for Shakspeare's *Malvolio*, a ~~part~~ which has often been performed by actors of sedate but palpable humour; and for *Trueman, sen.*, in the "Cutter of Coleman-street." Mr. Lovel died by or before the year 1673, when Downs expressly states that "the company was very much recruited" in consequence of that and similar events.

(3) Angel belonged to Rhodes's company, in which he was commonly an actor of female parts, and succeeded to James Nokes, as the heroine of the "Maid in the Mill." He was engaged by D'Avenant for his new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, where he is first noticed by Downs for the *Earl of Warwick*, in Lord Orrery's "Henry the Fifth," played, though not published, in 1667. He is highly praised by the same authority for his admirable performance of *Woodcock*, in the "Sullen Lovers," 4to, 1668. He played *Fribble*, in "Epsom Wells," 4to, 1673, after which period we can trace no farther evidence of his estimation or endeavours.

formance, as to be wholly out of her sight. In humour, he loved to take a full career, but was careful enough to

derbuss, and the other with a bow and arrow. Though this frivolous incident procured Nokes some accession of public notice, it was Dryden's "*Sir Martin Mar-all*," 4to, 1668, which developed his powers to their fullest extent, and raised him to the highest pitch of popularity.

According to Downs, the Duke of Newcastle (4) gave a literal translation of Moliere's "*Etourdi*" to Dryden, who adapted the part of *Sir Martin Mar-all* "purposely for the mouth of Mr. Nokes;" and the old prompter has corroborated Mr. Cibber's assertion of his success. (5) Nokes added largely to his reputation, in the same year, by performing *Sir Oliver*, in "She would if she could;" and strengthened Shadwell's "*Sullen Lovers*," by accepting the part of *Poet Ninny*. In the spring of 1671, (6) the king commanded the duke's servants to attend him at Dover, (7) to which place he had proceeded with all the court, to

(4) "*Sir Martin Mar-all*" is entered on the books of the Stationers' Company as his grace's production. It is not, however, a mere translation from Moliere, but is indebted to other quarters. Vide "*Biographia Dramatica*;" vol. 3, p. 278; ed. 1812.

(5) Downs's words, after recapitulating the *dramatis personæ*, run thus:—"All the parts being very just and exactly performed, especially *Sir Martin* and his man, Mr. Smith, and several others since have come very near him, but none equalled, nor yet Mr. Nokes in *Sir Martin*."—Upon this passage a late editor (Mr. Waldron) remarks, "that, in despair of being able to throw light on it, I shall leave it in its original obscurity." I cannot help thinking, however, that a very slight interpolation will retrieve the meaning of this sentence, and restore its identical structure:—"All the parts being very just-[ly] and exactly performed, especially *Sir Martin* and his man; Mr. Smith and several others since have come very near him, (Nokes) but none equalled [Mr. Harris in *Warner*,] nor yet Mr. Nokes in *Sir Martin*."

(6) Downs writes, but wrongly, "in May, 1670."

(7) "Neither Queen Elizabeth, nor King James the First, nor Charles the First, I believe, ever went to the public theatre; but they frequently ordered plays to be performed at court, which were represented in the royal theatre called the Cockpit, in Whitehall: and the actors of the King's Com-



stop short, when just upon the precipice. He had great variety in his manner, and was famous in very different

meet his sister, the Duchess of Orleans. Here Nokes was fortunate enough, in the rude narrative of Downs, to meet with the following distinction :—

“ The French court wearing then excessive short-laced coats, some scarlet, some blue, with broad waist-belts, Mr. Nokes having at that time one shorter than the French fashion, to act *Sir Arthur Addle* (8) in, the Duke of Monmouth gave Mr. Nokes his sword and belt from his side, and buckled it on himself, on purpose to ape the French; [so] that Mr. Nokes looked more like a dressed-up ape than *Sir Arthur*, which, upon his first entrance, on the stage, put the king and court to an excessive laughter; at which the French looked very chagrined to see themselves aped by such a buffoon as *Sir Arthur*. Mr. Nokes kept the duke's sword to his dying-day.”

Nokes acted *Barnaby Rattle* at the original appearance—about

pany were sometimes commanded to attend his majesty in his summer's progress, to perform before him in the country. Queen Henrietta Maria, however, went sometimes to the public theatre at Blackfriars. I find from the council-books that in the time of Queen Elizabeth, ten pounds was the payment for a play performed before her; that is twenty nobles, or six pounds, thirteen shillings, and four pence, as the regular and stated fee; and three pounds, six shillings, and eight pence, by way of bounty or reward. The same sum, as I learn from the manuscript notes of Lord Stanhope, treasurer of the chamber to King James the First, continued to be paid during his reign; and this was the stated payment during the reign of his successor also. Plays at court were usually performed at night, by which means they did not interfere with the regular exhibition at the public theatre, which was early in the afternoon; and thus the royal bounty was for so much a clear profit to the company: but when a play was commanded to be performed at any of the royal palaces in the neighbourhood of London, by which the actors were prevented from deriving any profit from a public exhibition on the same day, the fee, as appears from a manuscript in the Lord Chamberlain's office, was, in the year 1630, and probably in Shakspeare's time also, twenty pounds.”—Malone's “ Historical Account of the English Stage.”

(8) In “ *Sir Salomon* ;” 4to, 1671.

characters In the canting, grave hypocrisy of the Spanish Friar, he stretched the veil of piety so thinly over him,

1670—of Betterton's "Amorous Widow," and in 1672, performed *Old Jordan*, in Ravenscroft's "Citizen turned Gentleman," (9) a part which the king and court were said to have been more delighted with than any other, except *Sir Martin Mar-all*. (10) His *Nurse*, in "Caius Marius," 4to, 1680, excited such uncommon merriment, that he carried the name of Nurse Nokes to his grave. In 1688, he supported the hero of Shadwell's "Squire of Alsatia," a play which was acted in every part with remarkable excellence, and enjoyed the greatest popularity. (11) We find no farther mention of him, subsequent to this period, though included by Cibber among those who were performing under the united patents, in 1690, when he first came into the company. According to Brown, (12) who has peculiarly marked out his "gaiety and openness" upon the stage, he kept a "nick-nackatory, or toy-shop," opposite the spot which has since received the denomination of Exeter Change. The date of his death is uncertain, but there is some reason to presume that it happened about the year 1692. (13)

Edmund Smith, in his "Poem to the memory of Mr. John Phillips," has alluded, in very complimentary terms, to the merit

(9) This play was afterwards printed in 4to, 1675, by its established name of "Mamamouchi."

(10) So Downs, in his "Roscius Anglicanus."

(11) "This play by its excellent acting, being often honoured with the presence of Chancellor Jefferies, and other great persons, had an uninterrupted run of thirteen days together."—"Roscius Anglicanus."

(12) "Letters from the Dead," etc., part 1, p. 5, ed. 1744.

(13) In one of Brown's "Letters from the Dead," etc., dated 1701, Nokes is made to assure Haynes that his arrival had been long looked-for,—“Upon my salvation, we have expected you here this great while.”—A proof that he was not recently deceased.—“Works of Thomas Brown;” vol. 2, p. 5, 8th edition, 1744.

I see, also, that Cibber, on a subsequent page, says that Nokes, Mountfort, and Leigh, “died about the same year,” viz. 1692.

that in every look, word, and motion, you saw a palpable, wicked slyness shine through it. Here he kept his vivacity demurely confined, till the pretended duty of his function demanded it; and then he exerted it, with a choleric sacerdotal insolence. But the Friar is a character of such glaring vice, and so strongly drawn, that a very indifferent actor cannot but hit upon the broad jests, that are remarkable in every scene of it; though I have never yet seen any one, that has filled them with half the truth and spirit of Leigh. Leigh raised the character as much above the poet's imagination, as the character has "sometimes raised other actors above themselves; and I do not doubt but the poet's knowledge of Leigh's genius helped him to many a pleasant stroke of nature, which, without that knowledge, never might have entered into his conception. Leigh was so eminent in this character, that the late Earl of Dorset, who was equally an admirer and a judge of theatrical merit, had a whole length of him, in the Friar's habit, drawn by Kneller: the whole portrait is highly painted, and extremely like him. But no wonder Leigh arrived to such fame in what was so completely written for him; when characters that would make the reader yawn, in the closet, have by the strength of his action been lifted into the loud-

of Nokes,(14) and his influence upon public opinion has been grudgingly admitted by Dryden.(15) He was unquestionably a great original actor, and one of the firmest pillars by which the temple of comedy can ever be supported.

- (14) So, when Nurse Nokes to act young Ammon tries,  
 With shambling legs, long chin, and foolish eyes,  
 With dangling hands he strokes th'imperial robe,  
 And with a cuckold's air commands the globe:  
 The pomp and sound the whole buffoon display'd,  
 And Ammon's son more mirth than Gomez made.

(15) Prologue to the "Conquest of Grenada;" part 1.

est laughter, on the stage. Of this kind was the Scrivener's great booby son, in the "Villain;"\* and *Ralph*, a stupid, staring, under-servant, in "Sir Solomon Single."† Quite opposite to those were *Sir Jolly Jumble*, in the "Soldier's Fortune;" and his *Sir William Belfond*, in the "'Squire of Alsatia." In *Sir Jolly* he was all life, and laughing humour; and when Nokes acted with him‡ in the same play, they returned the ball so dexterously upon one another, that every scene between them seemed but one continued rest§ of excellence. But, alas! when those actors were gone, that comedy and many others, for the same reason, were

\* *Coligni*, the character alluded to, at the original representation of this play, was sustained, says Downs, "by that inimitable sprightly actor, Mr. Price,—especially in this part." Joseph Price joined D'Avenant's company on Rhodes's resignation, being one of "the new actors," according to the "*Roscus Anglicanus*," who were "taken in to complete" it. He is first mentioned for *Guillemster*, in "Hamlet;" and, in succession, for *Leonel*, in D'Avenant's "Love and Honour," on which occasion the Earl of Oxford gave him his coronation-suit; for *Paris*, in "Romeo and Juliet;" the *Corregidor*, in Tuke's "Adventures of five hours;" and *Coligni*, as already recorded. In the year 1663, by speaking a "short comical prologue" to the "Rivals," introducing some "very diverting dances," Mr. Price "gained him an universal applause of the town." The versatility of this actor must have been great, or the necessities of the company imperious, as we next find him set down for *Lord Sands*, in "King Henry the Eighth." He then performed *Will*, in the "Cutter of Coleman-street," and is mentioned by Downs as being dead, in the year 1673.

† The proper title of this play is "Sir Salomon; or, the Cautious Coxcomb."

‡ *Sir Davy Duncie*.

§ *Rest*.—A term from Tennis.

rarely known to stand upon their own legs; by seeing no more of Leigh or Nokes in them, the characters were quite sunk, and altered. In his *Sir William Belfond*, Leigh showed a more spirited variety than ever I saw any actor, in any one character, come up to: the poet, it is true, had here exactly chalked for him the outlines of nature; but the high colouring, the strong lights and shades of humour that enlivened the whole, and struck our admiration with surprise and delight, were wholly owing to the actor. The easy reader might, perhaps, have been pleased with the author without discomposing a feature; but the spectator must have heartily held his sides, or the actor would have heartily made them ache for it.

Now, though I observed before, that Nokes never was tolerably touched by any of his successors, yet in this character, I must own, I have seen Leigh extremely well imitated by my late facetious friend Pinkethman, who, though far short of what was inimitable in the original, yet, as to the general resemblance, was a very valuable copy of him; and, as I know Pinkethman cannot yet be out of your memory, I have chosen to mention him here, to give you the nearest idea I can, of the excellence of Leigh in that particular light: for Leigh had many masterly variations, which the other could not, nor ever pretended to reach; particularly in the dotage and follies of extreme old age, [as] in the characters of *Fumble*, in the “Fond Husband,”\* and the toothless lawyer, in the “City Politiques;”† both which plays lived only by the extraordinary performance of Nokes and Leigh.

There were two other characters of the farcical kind,

\* A comedy by D’Urfey, 4to, 1676, and generally esteemed to be the best of his indifferent productions.

† A comedy by Crowne, 4to, 1675.

*Geta*, in the “*Prophetess*,” and *Crack*, in “*Sir Courtly Nice*,” which, as they are less confined to nature, the imitation of them was less difficult to Pinkethman; who, to say the truth, delighted more in the whimsical than the natural; therefore, when I say he sometimes resembled Leigh, I reserve this distinction on his master’s side; that the pleasant extravagancies of Leigh were all the flowers of his own fancy, while the less fertile brain of my friend was contented to make use of the stock his predecessor had left him. What I have said, therefore, is not to detract from honest Pinky’s merit, but to do justice to his predecessor. And though it is true we as seldom see a good actor as a great poet arise from the bare imitation of another’s genius, yet, if this be a general rule, Pinkethman was the nearest to an exception from it; for, with those who never knew Leigh, he might very well have passed for a more than common original. Yet, again, as my partiality for Pinkethman ought not to lead me from truth, I must beg leave, though out of its place, to tell you fairly what was the best of him, that the superiority of Leigh may stand in its due light. Pinkethman had certainly, from nature, a great deal of comic power about him; but his judgment was by no means equal to it; for he would make frequent deviations into the whimsies of an *Harlequin*. By the way,—let me digress a little farther,—whatever allowances are made for the license of that character,—I mean of an *Harlequin*,—whatever pretences may be urged, from the practice of the antient comedy, for its being played in a mask, resembling no part of the human species; I am apt to think the best excuse a modern actor can plead for his continuing it, is, that the low, senseless, and monstrous things he says and does in it, no theatrical assurance could get through, with a bare face: let me give you an instance of even Pinkethman’s being out of countenance for want of it. When he first

played *Harlequin* in the “Emperor of the Moon,”\* several gentlemen, who inadvertently judged by the rules of nature, fancied that a great deal of the drollery and spirit of his grimace was lost, by his wearing that useless, unmeaning mask of a black cat, and therefore insisted that, the next time of his acting that part, he should play without it. Their desire was accordingly complied with,—but, alas! in vain: Pinkethman could not take to himself the shame of the character without being concealed; he was no more *Harlequin*; his humour was quite disconcerted; his conscience could not, with the same effrontery, declare against nature, without the cover of that unchanging face, which he was sure would never blush for it; no, it was quite another case; without that armour his courage could not come up to the bold strokes, that were necessary to get the better of common sense. Now if this circumstance will justify the modesty of Pinkethman, it cannot but throw a wholesome contempt on the low merit of an *Harlequin*. But how farther necessary the mask is to that fool’s coat, we have lately had a stronger proof in the favour that the “*Harlequin Sauvage*” met with at Paris, and the ill fate that followed the same *Sauvage*, when he pulled off his mask in London.† So that it seems, what was wit from an *Harlequin*, was something too extravagant from a human creature. If, therefore, Pinkethman, in characters drawn from nature, might sometimes launch out into a few game-some liberties, which would not have been excused from a more correct comedian, yet, in his manner of taking them, he always seemed to me in a kind of consciousness of the

\* A farce by Mrs. Behn, 4to, 1687.

† The piece thus obliquely satirised, is the “*Savage; or, the Force of Nature*,” advertised in 1736, with other plays published by L. Watts, but imagined not to be in print.

hazard he was running; as if he fairly confessed that what he did was only as well as he could do; that he was willing to take his chance for success, but if he did not meet with it, a rebuke should break no squares; he would mend it another time, and would take whatever [it] pleased his judges to think of him in good part: and I have often thought that a good deal of the favour he met with was owing to this seeming humble way of waiving all pretences to merit, but what the town would please to allow him. What confirms me in this opinion, is, that when it has been his ill fortune to meet with a *disgraccia*, I have known him say apart to himself, yet loud enough to be heard, “Odso! I believe I am a little wrong here;” which once was so well received by the audience, that they turned their reproof into applause.\*

\* The anecdote alluded to is thus related by Mr. Davies: (1)

“In the play of the “Recruiting Officer,” Wilks was the *Plume*, and Pinkethman one of the recruits. The captain, when he enlisted him, asked his name: instead of answering as he ought, Pinky replied, ‘Why, don’t you know my name, Bob? I thought every fool had known that!’ Wilks, in a rage, whispered to him the name of the recruit,—*Thomas Appletree*. The other retorted aloud, ‘*Thomas Appletree?* Thomas Devil! my name is Will Pinkethman:’ and, immediately addressing an inhabitant of the upper regions, he said ‘Hark you, friend; don’t you know my name?’—‘Yes, Master Pinky,’ said a respondent, ‘we know your name very well.’ The play-house was now in an uproar: the audience, at first, enjoyed the petulant folly of Pinkethman, and the distress of Wilks; but, in the progress of the joke, they grew tiresome, and Pinky met with his deserts,—a very severe reprimand in a hiss; but this mark of displeasure he changed into applause, by crying out, with a countenance as melancholy as he could make it, in a loud nasal twang, ‘Odso! I fear I am wrong.’”

(1) “Dramatic Miscellanies;” vol. 3, p. 87.



Now, the judgment of Leigh always guarded the happier sallies of his fancy from the least hazard of disapproba-

The first mention of Pinkethman, (2) by Downs, is for the part of *Ralph*, in "Sir Salomon," when commanded at court, in the beginning of 1705, but he had been alluded to, three years before, in Gildon's "Comparison between the Two Stages," as the "flower of Bartholomew-fair, and the idol of the rabble. A fellow that overdoes every thing, and spoils many a part with his own stuff." (3) He is again mentioned in the "Roscius Anglicanus" for *Dr. Caius*, in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," and continued to act in the Drury-lane company till his death; about the year 1725.

Pinkethman was a serviceable actor, notwithstanding his irregularities, and performed many characters of great importance. He was the original *Don Lewis*, (4) in "*Love makes a Man*," 4to, 1701, a proof that his talents were soon and greatly appreciated.

(2) I suspect that Pinkethman's first appearance upon the London boards was made in 1696, as Downs, writing in 1708, alludes to the money he had accumulated "in twelve years."

(3) In a poem called the "Players;" a satire, 1733, are the following lines, with the subjoined note:

Quit not your theme to win the gaping rout,  
Nor aim at Pinky's leer, with "Blood! I'm out;"  
An arch dull rogue, who lets the business cool,  
To show how nicely he can play the fool,  
Who with buffoonery his dulness clokes,  
Deserves a cat-o'-nine-tails for his jokes.

"This was not designed as an invidious reflection on the memory of Mr. Pinkethman, who was a pleasant and successful comedian; but to caution others from taking such liberties as he very often did; which have been censured in him, notwithstanding his uncommon pleasantry, and must appear very monstrous in persons of less humour."

(4) It was in this part, according to Steele, in his "Theatre," No. 28, that Pinkethman ate "two chickens in three seconds," and hence, the assertion in No 186 of the "Tattler," that he "devours a cold chick with great applause."

tion : he seemed not to court, but to attack your applause, and always came off victorious ; nor did his highest assurance amount to any more than that just confidence, without which the commendable spirit of every good actor must be

His eccentric turn led him, in too many instances, from the sphere of respectability, and we find him in the constant habit of frequenting fairs, for the low purpose of theatrical exhibition. (5) His stage talents were marred, it is true, by an extravagant habit of saying more than had been "set down" for him ; (6) and though this abominable blemish is fully admitted, still its toleration proves that Pinkethman must have been an actor of uncommon value. His son was a comedian of merit, who played *Waitwell*, in the "Way of the World," at the opening of Covent-garden theatre, in December, 1732, and died in May, 1740.

(5) "Advices from the upper end of Piccadilly say, that May-fair is utterly abolished ; and we hear Mr. Pinkethman has removed his ingenious company of strollers to Greenwich. But other letters from Deptford say, the company is only making thither, and not yet settled ; but that several heathen gods and goddesses, which are to descend in machines, landed at the King's-head stairs last Saturday. Venus and Cupid went on foot from thence to Greenwich ; Mars got drunk in the town, and broke his landlord's head, for which he sat in the stocks the whole evening ; but Mr. Pinkethman giving security that he should do nothing this ensuing summer, he was set at liberty. The most melancholy part of all was, that Diana was taken in the act of fornication with a boatman, and committed by Justice Wrathful, which has, it seems, put a stop to the diversions of the theatre of Blackheath. But there goes down another Diana and a Patient Grissel, next tide, from Billingsgate." — "Tattler ;" Tuesday, April 18, 1709.

(6) "Will Pinkethman, of merry memory, was in such full possession of the galleries, that he would hold discourse with them for several minutes. To fine him for this fault was in vain ; he could not forsake it, and the managers were too generous to curtail him of his income. At length, I was told, he and Wilks came to this whimsical agreement : Pinky consented, that whenever he was guilty of corresponding with the gods, he should receive, on his back, three smart strokes of Bob Wilks's cane. This fine, however, was I believe, never exacted." — "Dramatic Miscellanies ;" vol. 3, p. 86.

abated ; and of this spirit Leigh was a most perfect master. He was much admired by King Charles, who used to distinguish him, when spoken of, by the title of *his* actor : which, however, makes me imagine, that in his exile that prince might have received his first impression of good actors from the French stage ; for Leigh had more of that farcical vivacity than Nokes, but Nokes was never languid by his more strict adherence to nature : and as far as my judgment is worth taking, if their intrinsic merit could be justly weighed, Nokes must have had the better in the balance. Upon the unfortunate death of Mountfort, Leigh fell ill of a fever, and died in a week after him, in December, 1692.\*

\* The “ famous Mr. Antony Leigh,” as Downs denominates him, came into the duke’s company, about the year 1673, upon the deaths of several eminent actors, whose places he and others were admitted to supply. He played *Bellair, sen.*, in Etherege’s “ *Man of Mode*,” at its production in 1676. In 1681, Leigh supported *Father Dominic*, in Dryden’s “ *Spanish Friar* ;” a piece, which, according to the “ *Roscus Anglicanus*,” was “ admirably acted, and produced vast profit to the company.” Leigh’s success was so great in this character, that a full-length portrait was taken of him in his clerical habit, by Sir Godfrey Kneller, for the Earl of Dorset, from which a good mezzotinto engraving is now in the hands of theatrical collectors. In 1685, we find him allotted to *Sir Nicholas Calico*, in the “ *Man of Mode* :” in 1688 he supported *Sir William Belfond*, in Shadwell’s “ *Squire of Alsatia*,” and these parts, with a few others, appear to have constituted his peculiar excellence.

The satirical allusions of such a random genius as Brown, are rarely to be relied upon, or we might suspect Leigh, from the following extract, to have been distinguished by pious hypocrisy :—

“ At last, my friend Nokes, pointing to a little edifice, which exactly resembles Dr. Burgess’s conventicle in Russel-court, says he, ‘ your old acquaintance Tony Leigh, who turned presbyterian

Underhill was a correct and natural comedian; his particular excellence was in characters that may be called still-life,—I mean the stiff, the heavy, and the stupid: to these he gave the exactest, and most expressive colours, and in some of them, looked as if it were not in the power of human passions to alter a feature of him. In the solemn formality of *Obadiah*, in the “Committee,” and in the boobily heaviness of *Lolpoop*, in the “Squire of Alsatia,” he seemed the immovable log he stood for. A countenance of wood could not be more fixed than his; when the block-head of a character required it: his face was full and long; from his crown to the end of his nose, was the shorter half of it, so that the disproportion of his lower features, when soberly composed, with an unwandering eye hanging over them, threw him into the most lumpish, moping mortal, that ever made beholders merry; not but, at other times, he could be wakened into spirit equally ridiculous. In the coarse, rustic humour of *Justice Clodpate*, in “Epsom Wells,” he was a delightful brute; and in the blunt vivacity of *Sir Sampson*, in “Love for Love,” he showed all that true perverse spirit, that is commonly seen in much wit and ill-nature. This character is one of those few so well written, with so much wit and humour, that an actor must be the grossest dunce, that does not appear with an unusual life in it: but it will still show as great a proportion of skill, to come near Underhill in the acting it, which (not to undervalue those who soon came after him) I have not yet seen. He was particularly admired, too, for the *Grave-digger*, in “Hamlet.” The author of the “Tattler” re-

parson upon his coming into these quarters, holds forth most notably here every Sunday.’”—“Letters from the Dead to the Living.”

commends him to the favour of the town,\* upon that play's being acted for his benefit, wherein, after his age had some years obliged him to leave the stage, he came on again, for that day, to perform his old part; but, alas! so worn and disabled, as if himself was to have lain in the grave he was digging. When he could no more excite laughter, his infirmities were dismissed with pity. He died soon after, a *superannuated pensioner*, in the list of those who were supported by the joint sharers, under the first patent granted to Sir Richard Steele.†

\* Vide a subsequent page.

† Cave Underhill was a member of the company collected by Rhodes in June, 1660, and which, soon afterwards, submitted to the authority of Sir William D'Avenant. He is first mentioned by Downs, for his performance of *Sir Morglay Thwack*, in the "Wits," after which he sustained the *Grave-digger*, in "Hamlet," and soon testified such ability, that the manager publicly termed him "the truest comedian" at that time upon his stage. (1) Underhill, about this time, strengthened the cast of "Romeo and Juliet," by playing *Gregory*, and though the custom of devoting the best talent which the theatres afford, to parts of minor importance, has ceased, it is a practice to which the managers, were public amusement consulted, might safely recur. In Shakspeare's "Twelfth Night," which, says Downs, "had mighty success by its well performance," Underhill soon after supported the *Clown*, a character in which the latter attributes delineated by Cibber, could alone have been employed. Underhill's reputation appears to have been speedily established, as we find him intrusted by Cowley, in 1663, with the hero of his "Cutter of Coleman-street;" and he is mentioned by Downs for especial excellence in performing *Jodelet*, in D'Avenant's "Man's the Master." His first new part after the accession of James, was *Hothead*, in "Sir Courtly Nice;" on the 30th of

(1) "Roscius Anglicanus."

The deep impressions of these excellent actors, which I received in my youth, I am afraid, may have drawn me into

April, 1695, he distinguished himself by his chaste and spirited performance of *Sir Sampson Legend*, in Congreve's "Love for Love," (2) and in 1700, closed a long, arduous, and popular career of original parts, by playing *Sir Wilful Witwou'd*, in the "Way of the World."

A brief account of this valuable comedian has been furnished by Mr. Davies, which, for the satisfaction of our readers, we shall proceed to transcribe.

"Underhill was a jolly and droll companion, who divided his gay hours between Bacchus and Venus, with no little ardour, if we may believe such historians as Tom Brown. Tom, I think, makes Underhill one of the gill-drinkers of his time; men who resorted to taverns, in the middle of the day, under pretence of drinking Bristol milk, (for so good sherry was then called) to whet their appetites, where they indulged themselves too often in ebriety. Underhill acted till he was past eighty. He was so excellent in the part of *Trinculo*, in the "Tempest," that he was called Prince Trinculo. (3) He had an admirable vein of pleasantry, and told his lively stories, says Brown, with a bewitching grace. The same author says, he was so afflicted with the gout, that he prayed one minute, and cursed the other. His shambling gait, in his old age,

(2) The following advertisement appears in the first edition of the "Tattler," No. 20 :—

"Mr. Cave Underhill, the famous comedian in the reigns of King Charles the Second, King James the Second, King William and Queen Mary, and her present majesty Queen Ann; but now not able to perform so often as heretofore in the playhouse, and having had losses to the value of near £2,500, is to have the tragedy of "Hamlet" acted for his benefit, on Friday, the 3rd of June next, at the Theatre Royal, in Drury-lane, in which he is to perform his original part, the *Grave-digger*."

(3) I find, on looking over the "Roscius Anglicanus," that *Trinculo* is termed *Duke Trinculo*, in a short reference to the "Tempest."

the common foible of <sup>us</sup> old fellows ; which is a fondness, and, perhaps, a tedious partiality for the pleasures we have formerly tasted, and think are now fallen off, because we can no longer enjoy them. If, therefore, I lie under was no hindrance to his acting particular parts. He retired from the theatre in 1703."

On the 31st of May, 1709, Underhill applied for a benefit, and procured it, upon which occasion he played his favourite part of the *Grave-digger*, and received the following cordial recommendation from Sir Richard Steele :—(4)

" My chief business here, (5) this evening, was to speak to my friends in behalf of honest Cave Underhill, who has been a comic for three generations ; my father admired him extremely when he was a boy. There is certainly nature excellently represented in his manner of action ; in which he ever avoided that general fault in players, of doing too much. It must be confessed, he has not the merit of some ingenious persons now on the stage, of adding to his authors ; for the actors were so dull in the last age, that many of them have gone out of the world, without having ever spoken one word of their own in the theatre. Poor Cave is so mortified, that he quibbles and tells you, he pretends only to act a part fit for a man who has one foot in the grave ; viz. a *Grave-digger*. All admirers of true comedy, it is hoped, will have the gratitude to be present on the last day of his acting, who, if he does not happen to please them, will have it then to say, that it is the first time."—  
" Tattler," No. 22.

Sir Richard Steele obtained the patent alluded to by Cibber, on the 19th of January, 1714, and as Underhill was maintained for a space, however short, by the joint proprietors, his death may be placed, I suspect, about the commencement of the following year.

(4) I cannot refrain from instancing the rare talent, which has recently been evinced in this arduous character by Mr. Terry, who is perhaps the only actor now before us, by whom its sordid and unnatural sternness could have been adequately depicted.

(5) Will's Coffee-house.

that suspicion, though I have related nothing incredible, or out of the reach of a good judge's conception, I must appeal to those few, who are about my own age, for the truth and likeness of these theatrical portraits.

There were, at this time, several others in some degree of favour with the public; Powel, Verbruggen,\* Williams,†

\* John Verbruggen, it appears from the assertion of Mr. Davies, (1) was a dissipated young fellow, who determined, in opposition to the advice of his friends, to be an actor, and accordingly loitered about Drury-lane theatre, at the very time when Cibber was also endeavouring to get admittance, in expectation of employment. On the death of Mountfort, whose widow he married, Verbruggen was intrusted, I have no doubt, with the part of *Alexander*, his fondness for which was such, that he suffered the players and the public, for many years, to call him by no other name. (2) It is mentioned in more than one pamphlet, that Cibber and Verbruggen were at variance, and hence the animosity and unfairness with which the latter has been treated. (3)

(1) "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 417.

(2) "I have seen the name of Mr. Alexander to several parts in Dryden's plays; to *Ptolemy*, in "Cleomenes; or, the Spartan Hero;" to *Aurelius*, in "King Arthur;" and *Ramirez*, in "Love Triumphant; or, Nature will Prevail." Verbruggen, I believe, did not assume his own name, in the play-house bills, till the secession of Betterton and others from Drury-lane in 1695." "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 418.

(3) "That Verbruggen and Cibber did not accord, is plainly insinuated by the author of the "Laureat." It was known that the former would resent an injury, and that the latter's valour was entirely passive. The temper of Verbruggen may be known, from a story which I have often been told by the old comedians as a certain fact, and which found its way into some temporary publication.\*

"Verbruggen, in a dispute with one of King Charles's illegitimate sons, was so far transported by sudden anger, as to strike him, and call him a son of

\* The publication alluded to is an "Answer to the Case of Sir Richard Steele," 1720, where it is said that Verbruggen offered this affront to two young gentlemen of quality, at the theatre in Dorset-garden. The scene, at least, of this anecdote is not correctly laid, as the Dorset-garden house was finally abandoned before Verbruggen came to the stage.



&c. But as I cannot think their best improvements made them in any wise equal to those I have spoken of, I ought not

The first part to which Verbruggen can be traced, is *Aurelius*, in "King Arthur," 4to, 1691 : in the year 1696, Mr. Southern assigned him the character of *Oroonoko*, by the special advice of William Cavendish, the first Duke of Devonshire; and as the author informs us in his preface, "it was Verbruggen's endeavour, in the performance of that part, to merit the duke's recommendation." A further proof of Mr. Cibber's partiality, is the constant respect paid to Verbruggen by such judges of ability as Rowe and Congreve, for whose pieces he was uniformly selected. His *Mirabel*, in the "Way of the World," and *Bajazet*, in "Tamerlane," were parts of the highest importance, and it will be difficult to show that an ordinary actor could have been intrusted, by writers of equal power and fastidity, with duties of which he was not thoroughly deserving. When Verbruggen died it is impossible to ascertain. He played *Sullen*, in the "Beaux' Stratagem," at its production in 1707, and as Elrington made his appearance in *Bajazet*, in 1711, there is some reason to conclude that Verbruggen's death occurred during that interval.

Though Gildon, a scribbler whose venality was only exceeded by his dulness, has mentioned Verbruggen in the most derogatory terms, (4) there is ample evidence in the bare record of his busi-

a whore. The affront was given, it seems, behind the scenes of Drury-lane. Complaint was made of this daring insult on a nobleman, and Verbruggen was told, he must either not act in London, or submit publicly to ask the nobleman's pardon. During the time of his being interdicted acting, he had engaged himself to Betterton's theatre. He consented to ask pardon, on liberty granted to express his submission in his own terms. He came on the stage, dressed for the part of *Oroonoko*, and, after the usual preface, owned that he had called the Duke of St. A. a son of a whore. 'It is true,' said Verbruggen, 'and I am sorry for it.' On saying this, he invited the company present to see him act the part of *Oroonoko*, at the theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields."—"Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 419.

(4) "A fellow with a cracked voice : he clanged his words as if he spoke out of a broken drum."—"Comparison, &c." 1702."

to range them in the same class. Neither were Wilks or Dogget yet come to the stage; nor was Booth initiated till

ness, to justify the most unqualified merit we may incline to ascribe. Chetwood alludes to him, in pointing out Elrington's imitation of his excellencies, as "a very great actor in tragedy, and polite parts in comedy," (5) and the author of the "Laureat" enumerates a variety of important characters, in which he commanded universal applause. (6)

\* (1) Joseph Williams, who was bred a seal-cutter, came into the duke's company, about the year 1673, when but a boy, and according to the practice of that period, being apprenticed to an eminent actor, "served Mr. Harris." (2) I find him first mentioned by Downs, for *Pylades*, in the serious opera of "Circe;" his next character of importance being *Polydore*, in the "Orphan," 4to, 1680; and, same year, *Theodosius*, in Lee's tragedy of that name. The union in 1682, without diminishing his merit, appears to have lessened his value, by the introduction of Kynaston and others, who had more established pretensions to parts of importance.

The secession of Williams from Betterton's company, just before the opening in 1695, has been noticed and explained by Mr. Cibber, in a subsequent passage. Greatly, as I have no doubt, he has depreciated the merit of this actor, no materials remain of a more recent date than those already quoted, by which we may conjecture his talents, or enforce his estimation. Williams is not to be confounded with an actor of the same appellation, who was at Drury-lane theatre in the year 1730, and relieved Cibber of *Scipio*, in Thomson's "Sophonisba," a curious account of which is given in the "Dramatic Miscellanies."

(5) "History of the Stage," p. 137.

(6) Besides *Oroonoko*, are *Cassius*, *Ventidius*, *Chamont*, *Pierre*, *Cethegus*, and the hero of the "Rover."

(1) There was also a David Williams; perhaps the person who played the 2d *Grave-digger*, in "Hamlet."

(2) "Roscius Anglicanus."

(3) Vol. 3, p. 242.

about six years after them; or Mrs. Oldfield known till the year 1700.\* I must, therefore, reserve the four last for their proper period, and proceed to the actresses that were famous with Betterton, at the latter end of the last century.

Mrs. Barry was then in possession of almost all the chief parts of tragedy: with what skill she gave life to them, you will judge from the words of Dryden, in his preface to "Cleomenes," where he says,

Mrs. Barry, always excellent, has in this tragedy excelled herself, and gained a reputation beyond any woman I have ever seen on the theatre.

I very perfectly remember her acting that part; and however unnecessary it may seem to give my judgment after Dryden's, I cannot help saying I do not only close with his opinion, but will venture to add, that though Dryden has been dead these thirty-eight years, the same compliment, to this hour, may be due to her excellence. And though she was then, not a little, past her youth, she was not, till that time, fully arrived to her maturity of power and judgment: from whence I would observe, that the short life of beauty is not long enough to form a complete actress. In men, the delicacy of person is not so absolutely necessary, nor the decline of it so soon taken notice of. The fame Mrs. Barry arrived to is a particular proof of the difficulty there is in judging with certainty, from their first trials, whether young people will ever make any great figure on a theatre. There was, it seems, so little hope of Mrs. Barry, at her first setting out, that she was, at the end of the first year, discharged the company, among others that were thought to be a useless expense to it. I take it

\* The four last performers are duly noticed in more suitable situations.

for granted that the objection to Mrs. Barry, at that time, must have been a defective ear, or some unskilful dissonance in her manner of pronouncing : but ~~where~~ <sup>there</sup> is a proper voice and person, with the addition of a good understanding, experience tells us that such a defect is not always invincible ; of which both Mrs. Barry and the late Mrs. Oldfield are eminent instances. Mrs. Oldfield had been a year in the theatre royal, before she was observed to give any tolerable hope of her being an actress ; so unlike to all manner of propriety, was her speaking. How unaccountably, then, does a genius for the stage make its way towards perfection ! For, notwithstanding these equal disadvantages, both these actresses, though of different excellence, made themselves complete mistresses of their art, by the prevalence of their understanding. If this observation may be of any use to the masters of future theatres, I shall not then have made it to no purpose.

Mrs. Barry, in characters of greatness, had a presence of elevated dignity ; her mien and motion superb, and gracefully majestic ; her voice full, clear, and strong, so that no violence of passion could be too much for her : and when distress or tenderness possessed her, she subsided into the most affecting melody and softness. In the art of exciting pity, she had a power beyond all the actresses I have yet seen, or what your imagination can conceive. Of the former of these two great excellencies, she gave the most delightful proofs in almost all the heroic plays of Dryden and Lee ; and of the latter, in the softer passions of Otway's *Monimia*\* and *Belvidera*. In scenes of anger, defiance, or

\* “——I have heard her say, that she never said,

Ah, poor Castalio !

without weeping ; and I have frequently observed her change her countenance several times, as the discourse of others on the stage have [has] affected her in the part she acted.”—Gildon's “Life of Betterton,” p. 40, 1710.

resentment, while she was impetuous and terrible, she poured out the sentiment with an enchanting harmony; and it was this particular excellence, for which Dryden made her the above-recited compliment, upon her acting *Cassandra*, in his "Cleomenes." But here, I am apt to think his partiality for that character, may have tempted his judgment to let it pass for her master-piece; when he could not but know, there were several other characters in which her action might have given her a fairer pretence to the praise he has bestowed on her, for *Cassandra*; for, in no part of that, is there the least ground for compassion, as in *Monimia*; nor equal cause for admiration, as in the nobler love of *Cleopatra*, or the tempestuous jealousy of *Roxana*. 'Twas in these lights, I thought, Mrs. Barry shone with a much brighter excellence than in *Cassandra*. She was the first person whose merit was distinguished by the indulgence of having an annual benefit-play, which was granted to her alone, if I mistake not, first in King James's time,\* and which became not common to others, till the division of this company, after the death of King William's queen, Mary. This great actress died of a fever, towards the latter end of Queen Ann; the year I have forgotten; but perhaps you will recollect it, by an expression that fell

\* Mr. Cibber is inaccurate in this fact; for it appears from the agreement concluded between Dr. D'Avenant, Hart, Betterton, and others, on the 14th of October, 1681, that the actors *then* had benefits; as by this agreement five shillings a-piece were to be paid to Hart and Kynaston, "for every day there shall be any tragedies or comedies, or other representations, acted at the Duke's Theatre, in Salisbury-court, or wherever the company shall act, during the respective lives of the said Charles Hart and Edward Kynaston, *excepting the day the young men or young women play for their own profit only.*"—Gildon's "Life of Betterton," p. 8.

In Shakspeare's time the actors had not annual benefits.

from her in blank verse, in her last hours, when she was delirious, *viz.*

Ha, ha ! and so they make us lords, by dozens !\*

\* Elizabeth Barry, it is said, was the daughter of Edward Barry, Esq., a barrister, who was afterwards called Colonel Barry, from his having raised a regiment for the service of Charles the First, in the course of the civil wars. The misfortunes arising from this engagement, involved him in such distress, that his children were obliged to provide for their own maintenance. Lady D'Avenant, a relation of the noted laureat, from her friendship to Colonel Barry, gave this daughter a genteel education, and made her a constant associate in the circle of polite intercourse. These opportunities gave an ease and grace to Mrs. Barry's behaviour, which were of essential benefit, when her patroness procured her an introduction to the stage. This happened in the year 1673, when Mrs. Barry's efforts were so extremely unpropitious, that the directors of the duke's company pronounced her incapable of making any progress in the histrionic art. Three times, according to Curl's "History of the Stage," (1) she was dismissed, and by the interest of her benefactor, re-instated. When Otway, however, produced his "Alcibjades," in 1675, her merit was such, as not only to excite the public attention, but to command the author's praise, which has been glowingly bestowed upon her in the preface to that production. We find her, next season, filling the lively character of *Mrs. Lovit*, in Etherege's "Man of Mode;" and in 1680, her performance of *Monimia*, in the "Orphan," seems to have raised that reputation to its greatest height, which had been gradually increasing. The part of *Belvidera*, two years afterwards, and the heroine of Southern's "Fatal Marriage," in 1694, elicited unrivalled talent, and procured her universal distinction.

When Mrs. Barry first resorted to the theatre, her pretensions to notice were a good air and manner, and a very powerful and pleas-

(1) Published in 1741.

Mrs. Betterton, though far advanced in years, was so great a mistress of nature, that even Mrs. Barry, who acted

ing voice. Her ear, however, was so extremely defective, that several eminent judges, on seeing her attempt a character of some importance, gave their opinion that she never could be an actress. Upon the authority of Curl's historian, Mr. Davies (3) has compiled what appears to me an apocryphal tale of her sudden rise to the pinnacle of excellence, though there is no reason to dispute her criminal intimacy with the Earl of Rochester. (4) I am not inclined, while doubting the precise anecdote of his assistance, to deny that much advantage might have been derived from his general instructions.

Mrs. Barry was not only remarkable for the brilliancy of her talent, but the earnestness of her zeal, and the ardour of her assiduity. Betterton, that kind, candid, and judicious observer, bore

th (3) "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 198. This narrative, considering it to be valueless, is too long for transcription, and I shall therefore content myself with remarking, that Lord Rochester is said to have qualified Mrs. Barry for the part of *Isabella, Queen of Hungary*, in the Earl of Orrery's "Mustapha." Now this tragedy was originally produced in 1668, when Mrs. Davies sustained the character alluded to, and it is not likely, while revivals were uncommon, that so temporary a piece should be restored to the stage, for the mere purpose of exhibiting Lord Rochester's exploded pupil.

Independent of these reasons, it may be urged, that as Mrs. Barry was but fifteen years of age when she entered the company, in 1673,\* and distinguished herself during the season of 1675, that there could not have been the slightest grounds for such a desperate exertion as her noble protector is alleged to have made.

(4) It has been said, that he fixed his affections on her more strongly than on any other female. Letters addressed to Madam B——, by the Earl of Rochester, were printed in that edition of his poems fit for the public eye, which was published by J. Tonson, in 1716, and are generally said to be the earl's epistolary correspondence with this celebrated actress. In some of them, he speaks with great fondness of a child he had by her, and to whom he afterwards left, by will, an annuity of £40.—"Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 198.

\* It will be seen on the next page, that she died, aged 55 years, in 1713.

*Lady Macbeth* after her, could not in that part, with all her superior strength, and melody of voice, throw out those

this testimony to her eminent abilities, and unyielding good-nature, that she often exerted herself so greatly in a pitiful character, that her acting has given success to plays which would disgust the most patient reader. (5.) When she accepted a part, it was her uniform practice to consult the author's intention. Her last new character was the heroine of Smith's "*Phædra and Hippolytus*," and though Mrs. Oldfield and the poet fell out concerning a few lines in the part of *Ismena*, Mrs. Barry and he were in perfect harmony.

Mrs. Barry must have closed her career with this performance, being mentioned by Steele, in the "*Tattler*," when assisting at Betterton's benefit, on Thursday, April 7, 1709, as "not at present concerned in the house." She died on the 7th of November, 1713, aged 55 years, and was buried in Acton church-yard. Mr. Davies ascribes her death to the bite of a favourite lap-dog, who, unknown to her, had been seized with madness, and there seems to be no grounds for disturbing his supposition.

The moral character of Mrs. Barry appears to be unworthy of particular estimation, for though we may feel reluctant to depend upon the satirical testimony of Brown, (6) there is complete reason to conclude, that she dispensed her favours with considerable liberality. The temptations to which a popular actress is exposed, are many and powerful; vice, too, obtains an excuse among this class of persons, from the meanness of their origin and the poverty of their intellect; but let them remember that the honours of triumph are always proportioned to the dangers of trial, and they will enrich the stage with a character for virtue and discretion, which the warmest friends to their calling must feel anxious to see it attain.

(5) "*Life of Betterton*," p. 16.

(6) "Should you lie with her all night, she would not know you next morning, unless you had another five pounds at her service."—Brown's "*Works*," vol. 3, p. 36, 1744.



quick and careless strokes of terror, from the disorder of a guilty mind, which the other gave us, with a facility in her manner, that rendered them at once tremendous and delightful. Time could not impair her skill, though he had brought her person to decay. She was to the last, the admiration of all true judges of nature, and lovers of Shakspeare, in whose plays she chiefly excelled, and without a rival. When she quitted the stage, several good actresses were the better for her instruction. She was a woman of an unblemished and sober life; and had the honour to teach Queen Ann, when princess, the part of *Semandra*, in "Mithridates," which she acted at court in King Charles's time. After the death of Mr. Betterton, her husband, that princess, when queen, ordered her a pension for life, but she lived not to receive more than the first half year of it.\*

Mrs. Barry is supposed to be alluded to in the 20th Number of the "Tattler," as the "*famous* (7) she tragedian," who, "had settled her estate, after her death, for the maintenance of decayed wits, who are to be taken in as soon as they grow dull, at whatever time of their life that shall happen."

\* When Sir William D'Avenant undertook the management of the duke's company, he lodged and boarded four principal actresses in his house, among whom was Mrs. Saunderson, the subject of this article.

In the year 1666, a Mrs. Coleman had represented *Ianthe*, in the first part of D'Avenant's "Siege of Rhodes;" but the little she had to communicate was delivered in recitative. The first woman that appeared in any regular drama on a public stage, performed the part of *Desdemona*; but who that lady was, it is im-

(7) The epithet of "*famous*," by which Mrs. Barry has been exclusively distinguished, is perhaps sufficient to authorise our pronouncing her the object of this satirical fabrication. Downs, speaking of her *Monimia*, *Belvidera*, and *Isabella*, says, they "gained her the name of *famous* Mrs. Barry, both at court and city."

Mrs. Leigh, the wife of Leigh already mentioned, had a very droll way of dressing the pretty foibles of superannuous to ascertain. "Othello" was performed by the Red Bull company, at their new theatre in Vere-street, Clare-market, on Saturday, December 8th, 1660, for the first time that winter, and on that day, it is probable, an actress first appeared on the English stage. A prologue was furnished for this occasion by Thomas Jordan, who seems to insinuate that the lady performing *Desdemona*, was an unmarried woman, which precludes Mrs. Hughs, (1) whose husband was in the company, from the honours of that assumption. It has been conjectured, that Mrs. Saunderson made her first essay there, though afterwards attached to D'Avenant's company, and in this case, the received tradition that she was the first English actress, will be completely confirmed.

Mrs. Saunderson's first appearance in D'Avenant's company, was made as *Ianthe*, in the "Siege of Rhodes," on the opening of his new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, in April 1662. She played *Ophelia* soon afterwards, and that part being followed by Shakspeare's *Juliet*, evinces the consideration in which her services were held. In 1663, she married Mr. Betterton, and not in 1670, as it is erroneously mentioned in the "Biographia Dramatica," and other worthless compilations. (2)

(1) Margaret Hughs must have joined the royal company before its establishment at the theatre in Drury-lane, as her name is mentioned by Downs for *Desdemona*, in the year 1663. We afterwards trace her to *Theodosia*, in Dryden's "Evening's Love," 4to, 1671; after which she is no more to be met with.

In Brown's collection of "Letters from the Dead to the Living," there is a very objurative epistle addressed by Nell Gwyn to this lady, to which she replies in a snitable strain. Various allusions are also made to Prince Rupert, by whom Mrs. Hughs had been taken from the stage, and enriched with a splendid property, which, in the decline of life, she entirely exhausted by dice and cards. Brandenburg-house, now inhabited by her Majesty, was settled upon this actress by her gallant lover, and formed the scene, for many years, of their unchaste and luxurious orgies. These letters were published in the year 1702, and Mrs. Hughs at that time was evidently in existence.

(2) Downs expressly mentions her as Mrs. Betterton for *Camilla*, in the

nuated beauties. She had, in her self, a good deal of humour, and knew how to infuse it into the affected mothers, aunts, and modest stale maids, that had missed their market : of this sort were the modish mother, in the “Chances,” affecting to be politely *commode*, for her own daughter ; the coquette prude of an aunt, in “Sir Courtly Nice,” who prides herself in being chaste and cruel, at fifty ; and the languishing *Lady Wishfor’t*, in the “Way of the World.” In all these, with many others, she was extremely enter-

The principal characters sustained by Mrs. Betterton, were *Queen Catharine*, in “Henry the Eighth ;” the *Duchess of Malfoy* ; the *Amorous Widow* ; those enumerated in the text, and many others, not less remarkable for their importance than their variety. On the death of her husband, in April 1710, she was so strongly affected by that event, as to lose her senses, which were recovered, however, a short time previous to her own decease. Mr. Cibber may be right in stating that she only enjoyed the bounty of her royal mistress for about half a year : but, in that case, the pension could not have been granted directly he died, as we find that Mrs. Betterton was alive on the 4th of June, 1711, more than thirteen months after, and had the play of “Sir Fopling Flutter,” performed at Drury-lane for her benefit. (3) Mrs. Betterton, though prevented from performing, by age and infirmity, enjoyed a sinecure situation in Drury-lane theatre, till she withdrew from it, in 1709, and was paid at the rate of two pounds a-week. The “*Biographia Britannica*” says she survived her husband eighteen months, but the precise date of her decease has never been discovered.

“Adventures of Five Hours,” folio, 1663 ; and she also acted by that name, a few months after, in the “Slighted Maid.” This error originated with the “*Biographia Britannica*,” but Mr. Jones, the late slovenly editor of the book alluded to, had ample means to correct it.

(3) See an advertisement quoted from the original edition of the “Spectator,” in Davies’s “*Dramatic Miscellanies*,” vol. 3, p. 398.

taining, and painted, in a lively manner, the blind side of nature.\*

Mrs. Butler, who had her christian name of Charlotte given her by King Charles, was the daughter of a decayed knight, and had the honour of that prince's recommendation to the theatre; a provident restitution, giving to the stage in kind, what he had sometimes taken from it: the public, at least, was obliged by it; for she proved not only a good actress, but was allowed in those days, to sing and dance to great perfection. In the dramatic operas of "Dioclesian," and "King Arthur," she was a capital and admired performer. In speaking, too, she had a sweet-toned voice, which, with her naturally genteel air and sensible pronunciation, rendered her wholly mistress of the amiable, in many serious characters. In parts of humour, too, she had a manner of blending her assuasive softness, even with the gay, the lively, and the alluring. Of this she gave an agreeable instance, in her action of the (Villiers) Duke of Buckingham's *2d. Constantia*, in the "Chances," in which, if I should say I have never seen her exceeded, I might still

\* According to the statement of Downs, Mrs. Leigh came into the duke's company, about the year 1670, and is first mentioned for *Betty Trickmore*, in "Mamamouchi," 4to, 1672. I cannot explain the oddness of her being engaged three years before the retention of her husband, who is said by Downs to have joined the same company in 1673, but there may be an oversight in not placing the employment of Leigh to an earlier period. I cannot find any mention of this respectable lady, subsequent to her performance of *Lady Wishfor't*, in 1700, soon after which, as honest Downs says, she was probably "erept the stage." (1)

(1) This lady is probably not a distinct person from the Mrs. Mary Lee, or Leigh, who played the heroine of Dryden's "Troilus and Cressida," at its appearance in 1679. I should not have entertained a doubt upon the subject, had Cibber spoken, however lightly, of her tragic attempts.

do no wrong to the late Mrs. Oldfield's lively performance of the same character. Mrs. Oldfield's fame may spare Mrs. Butler's action this compliment, without the least diminution or dispute of her superiority, in characters of more moment.\*

Here I cannot help observing, when there was but one theatre in London, at what unequal salaries, compared to those of later days, the hired actors were then held, by the absolute authority of their frugal masters, the patentees; for Mrs. Butler had then but forty shillings a week, and could she have obtained an addition of ten shillings more, which was refused her, would never have left their service; but being offered her own conditions, to go with Mr. Ashbury† to Dublin, who was then raising a company of actors for that theatre, where there had been none since the revolution, her discontent, here, prevailed with her to accept of his offer, and he found his account in her value. Were not those patentees most sagacious economists, that could

\* Very little can be added to this account of Charlotte Butler, who appeared upon the Dublin boards, some time in the month of March, 1692. Her line of business, both serious and comic, was but of a secondary nature, as I find her set down for *Serina*, in the "Orphan," and *Philidel*, in "King Arthur."

† Joseph Ashbury was a Londoner, and born in the year 1638, of an antient family. He was related, by the mother's side, to Sir Walter Raleigh, and after receiving a classical education at Eton, procured a pair of colours under the Duke of Ormond, and went over to Ireland, in the last year of Cromwell's protectorate. Mr. Ashbury was concerned in the seizure of Dublin Castle, when Governor Jones was secured in behalf of Charles the Second. He was made lieutenant of foot in 1680, and succeeded his deceased predecessor, Ogilby, as Master of the Revels, in 1682, at the nomination of the Duke of Ormond, then viceroy of the kingdom. He died, July 24, 1720.

lay hold on so notable an expedient to lessen their charge ? How gladly, in my time of being a sharer, would we have given four times her income, to an actress of equal merit !

Mrs. Mountfort, whose second marriage gave her the name of Verbruggen, was mistress of more variety of humour than I ever knew in any one woman actress. This variety, too, was attended with an equal vivacity, which made her excellent in characters extremely different. As she was naturally a pleasant mimic, she had the skill to make that talent useful on the stage, a talent which may be surprising in a conversation, and yet be lost when brought to the theatre, which was the case of *Estcourt*\* already mentioned ; but where the elocution is round, distinct, voluble, and various, as Mrs. Mountfort's was, the mimic, there, is a great assistant to the actor. Nothing, though ever so barren, if within the bounds of nature, could be flat in her hands. She gave many heightening touches to characters but coldly written, and often made an author vain of his work, that in itself had but little merit. She was so fond of humour, in what low part soever to be found, that she would make no scruple of defacing her fair form, to come heartily into it : for when she was eminent in several desirable characters of wit and humour, in higher life, she would be in as much fancy, when descending into the antiquated *Abigail*, of Fletcher, as when triumphing in all the

\* Mr. Cibber's animosity to the merit of *Estcourt*, is too conspicuous to be overlooked. Perhaps the following notice from the "Tattler," No. 20, will suffice to set this question at rest.

"This evening was acted the "Recruiting Officer," in which *Estcourt's* proper sense and observation is what supports the play. There is not, in my humble opinion, the humour hit in *Serjeant Kite*, but it is admirably supplied by his action. If I have skill to judge, that man is an excellent actor."

airs, and vain graces, of a fine lady ; a merit, that few actresses care for. In a play of D'Urfe's, now forgotten, called, the "Western Lass," which part she acted, she transformed her whole being, body, shape, voice, language, look, and features, into almost another animal ; with a strong Devonshire dialect, a broad laughing voice, a poking head, round shoulders, an unconceiving eye, and the most bedizenizing, dowdy dress, that ever covered the untrained limbs of a Joan Trot. To have seen her here, you would have thought it impossible the same creature could ever have been recovered to what was as easy to her, the gay, the lively, and the desirable. Nor was her humour limited to her sex ; for, while her shape permitted, she was a more adroit pretty fellow than is usually seen upon the stage : her easy air, action, mien, and gesture, quite changed from the quiff, to the cocked hat, and cavalier in fashion. People were so fond of seeing her a man, that when the part of *Bays*, in the "Rehearsal," had, for some time, lain dormant, she was desired to take it up, which I have seen her act with all the true coxcomby spirit and humour, that the sufficiency of the character required.

But what found most employment for her whole various excellence at once, was the part of *Melantha*, in "Marriage-Alamode." *Melantha* is as finished an impertinent as ever fluttered in a drawing-room, and seems to contain the most complete system of female foppery, that could possibly be crowded into the tortured form of a fine lady. Her language, dress, motion, manners, soul, and body, are in a continual hurry to be something more than is necessary or commendable. And though I doubt it will be a vain labour, to offer you a just likeness of Mrs. Mountfort's action, yet the fantastic impression is still so strong in my memory, that I cannot help saying something, though fantastically, about it. The first ridiculous airs that break from her, are,

upon a gallant, never seen before, who delivers her a letter from her father, recommending him to her good graces, as an honourable lover. Here, now, one would think she might naturally show a little of the sex's decent reserve, though never so slightly covered. No, sir ; not a tittle of it ; modesty is the virtue of a poor-souled country gentlewoman ; she is too much a court lady, to be under so vulgar a confusion ; she reads the letter, therefore, with a careless, dropping lip, and an erected brow, humming it hastily over, as if she were impatient to outgo her father's commands, by making a complete conquest of him at once ; and that the letter might not embarrass her attack, crack ! she crumbles it at once into her palm, and pours upon him her whole artillery of airs, eyes, and motion ; down goes her dainty, diving body, to the ground, as if she were sinking under the conscious load of her own attractions ; then launches into a flood of fine language and compliment, still playing her chest forward in fifty falls and risings, like a swan upon waving water ; and, to complete her impertinence, she is so rapidly fond of her own wit, that she will not give her lover leave to praise it : silent, assenting bows, and vain endeavours to speak, are all the share of the conversation he is admitted to, which, at last, he is relieved from, by her engagement to half a score visits, which she *swims* from him to make, with a promise to return in a twinkling.

If this sketch has colour enough to give you any near conception of her, I then need only tell you, that throughout the whole character, her variety of humour was every way proportionable ; as, indeed, in most parts that she thought worth her care, or that had the least matter for her fancy to work upon, I may justly say, that no actress, from her own conception, could have heightened them with more lively strokes of nature.\*

\* Susanna Mountfort is first mentioned in the "Roscius Angli-



I come now to the last, and only living person of all those whose theatrical characters I have promised you, Mrs. Bracegirdle ; who, I know, would rather pass her remaining days forgotten, as an actress, than to have her youth recollected in the most favourable light I am able to place it in ; yet, as she is essentially necessary to my theatrical history, and as I only bring her back to the company of those, with whom she passed the spring and summer of her life, I hope it will excuse the liberty I take, in commemorating the de-

canus" for *Serina*, in the "Orphan," a part, however, which she did not play, it having been allotted to Mrs. Butler. She continued with Mohun during his short opposition to the united companies, and was then admitted with her husband into Drury-lane theatre, where the first parts to which I find her name affixed, are *Morayma*, in "Don Sebastian," and *Phædra*, in "Amphytrion," both produced in 1690. She was a widow at her flight from Lincoln's-inn-fields, in 1695, upon which she returned to her old station, and, perhaps soon afterwards, married Verbruggen. Her reputation shortly stood so high, that Gildou, in his "Comparison," &c., 1702, terms her a miracle, in direct depreciation of Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Rogers.

I can add nothing to the copious, animated, and correct account of this lady which Cibber has left us, beyond a notification of the spirited manner in which she performed the part of *Bays*. She died, giving birth to a child, in the year 1703, and left an only daughter, Susanna Mountfort, who made her début at Drury-lane theatre, in 1705, on which occasion she spoke a temporary epilogue, frankly avowing her own deficiencies, but claiming support from the memory of her mother's merits.

A phoenix once you had, ~~that~~<sup>each</sup> allows ;  
 Think from her ashes I, *I only* rose :  
 Like her no pains I'll spare, like her to last,  
 And please in various ways your various taste  
 Believe me promising, though young and wild,  
 And for the mother's worth support the child.\*

light which the public received from her appearance, while she was an ornament to the theatre.

Mrs. Bracegirdle was now but just blooming to her maturity; her reputation, as an actress, gradually rising with that of her person; never any woman was in such general favour of her spectators, which, to the last scene of her dramatic life, she maintained, by not being unguarded in her private character.\* This discretion contri-

\* Mrs. Bracegirdle was decidedly not "unguarded" in her conduct, for though the object of general suspicion, no proof of positive unchastity was ever brought against her. Her intrigue with Mountfort, who lost his life in consequence of it, (1) is hardly to be disputed, and there is pretty ample evidence that Congreve was honoured with a gratification of his amorous desires. (2)

(1) "We had not parted with him as many minutes as a man may beget his likeness in, but who should we meet but Mountfort the player, looking as pale as a ghost, sailing forward as gently as a caterpillar 'cross a sycamore leaf, gaping for a little air, like a sinner just come out of the powdering-tub, crying out as he crept towards us, 'O my back! Confound 'em for a pack of brimstones: O my back!'—'How now, *Sir Courtly*,' said I, 'what the devil makes thee in this pickle?'—'O, gentlemen,' says he, 'I am glad to see you; but I am troubled with such a weakness in my back, that it makes me bend like a superannuated fornicator.' 'Some strain,' said I, 'got in the other world, with overheaving yourself.'—'What matters it how 'twas got,' says he; 'can you tell me anything that's good for it?' 'Yes,' said I; 'get a warm girdle and tie round you; 'tis an excellent corroborative to strengthen the loins.'—'Pox on you,' says he, 'for a bantering dog! how can a single *girdle* do me good, when a *Brace* was my destruction?'"—Brown's "Letters from the Dead to the Living."

(2) In one of those infamous collections known by the name of "Poems on State Affairs," there are several obvious, though coarse and detestable, hints of this connexion. Collier's severity against the stage is thus sarcastically deprecated, in a short piece called the "Benefits of a Theatre."

Shall a place be put down, when we see it affords  
*Fit wives for great poets*, and whores for great lords?  
 Since *Angelica*, bless'd with a singular grace,  
 Had, by her fine acting, preserv'd all his plays,  
 In an amorous rapture, young *Valentin* said,  
 One so fit for his plays might be fit for his bed.

buted, not a little, to make her the *cara*, the darling of the theatre ; for it will be no extravagant thing to say, scarce an audience saw her that were less than half of them lovers, without a suspected favourite among them : and though she might be said to have been the universal passion, and under the highest temptations, her constancy in resisting them served but to increase the number of her admirers : and this, perhaps, you will more easily believe, when I extend not my encomiums on her person, beyond a sincerity that can be suspected ; for she had no greater claim to beauty, than what the most desirable brunette might pretend to. But her youth, and lively aspect, threw out such a glow of health and cheerfulness, that, on the stage, few spectators that were not past it, could behold her without desire. It was even a fashion among the gay and young, to have a taste or *tendre* for Mrs. Bracegirdle. She inspired the best authors to write for her, and two\* of them, when they

\* Rowe and Congreve, the latter of whom is believed to have been the object of Mrs. Bracegirdle's congenial attachment. His assiduous attentions were by no means unnoticed ; nor, if the sub-joined extract from Brown's " Amusements " be not utterly devoid of foundation, were they unfitted for censure :

“ That poet there that shows his assiduity by following yon-

The allusion to Congreve and Mrs. Bracegirdle wants, of course, no corroboration ; but the hint at their marriage, broached in the half line I have italicised, is a curious though unauthorized fact. From the verses I shall continue to quote, it will appear that this marriage between the parties, though thought to be private, was currently believed ; it is an expedient that has often been used, in similar cases, to cover the nakedness of outrageous lust.

He warmly pursues her, she yielded her charms,  
And bless'd the kind youngster in her kinder arms :  
But at length the poor nymph did for justice implore,  
And he 's married her now, though he ——'d her before.

On a subsequent page of the same precious miscellany, there is a most offensive statement of the cause which detached our great comic writer from the object of his passion. The thing is too filthy to be even described.

gave her a lover, in a play, seemed palpably to plead their own passions, and make their private court to her in fictitious characters. In all the chief parts she acted, the desirable was so predominant, that no judge could be cold enough to consider, from what other particular excellence she became delightful. To speak critically of an actress that was extremely good, were as hazardous as to be positive in one's opinion of the best opera singer. People often judge by comparison, where there is no similitude in the performance. So that, in this case, we have only taste to appeal to, and of taste there can be no disputing. I shall therefore only say of Mrs. Bracegirdle, that the most eminent authors always chose her for their favourite character, and shall leave that incontestible proof of her merit to its own value. Yet let me say, there were two very different characters, in which she acquitted herself with uncommon applause: if anything could excuse that desperate extravagance of love, that almost frantic passion of Lee's Alexander the Great, it must have been, when Mrs. Bracegirdle was his *Statira*: as when she acted *Mil-lamant*, all the faults, follies, and affectation of that agreeable tyrant, were venially melted down into so many charms, and attractions of a conscious beauty. In other characters, where singing was a necessary part of them, her voice and action gave a pleasure, which good sense, in those days, was not ashamed to give praise to.

She retired from the stage in the height of her favour from the public, when most of her cotemporaries, whom

der actress, is the most entertaining sort of an animal imaginable. But 'tis the *Way of the World* to have an esteem for the fair sex; and she looks to a miracle, when she is acting a part in one of his own plays.\*\*\*\* He dines with her almost every day, yet she's a maid; he rides out with her, and visits her in private and public, yet she's a maid," &c.—Vol. 3, p. 36, 1744.

she had been bred up with, were declining, in the year 1708,\* nor could she be persuaded to return to it, under new masters, upon the most advantageous terms, that were offered her; excepting one day, about a year after, to assist her good friend, Mr. Betterton, when she played *Angelica*, in "Love for Love," for his benefit. She has still the happiness to retain her usual cheerfulness, and to be, without the transitory charm of youth, agreeable.†

If, in my account of these memorable actors, I have not deviated from truth, which, in the least article, I am not conscious of, may we not venture to say, they had not their equals, at any one time, upon any theatre in Europe? Or, if we confine the comparison to that of France alone, I believe no other stage can be much disparaged, by being left out of the question; which cannot properly be decided,

\* The original date here is 1710, but as Mr. Betterton's benefit occurred on the 7th of April, 1709, and as Mr. Cibber clearly means to assert that Mrs. Bracegirdle had left the stage twelve months before it took place, I have corrected accordingly.

† Ann Bracegirdle was driven from the stage by the predominating youth, beauty, talents, and influence of Mrs. Oldfield, about the year 1708. (1) The friends of the latter lady, conceiving her to be entitled to that distinction, claimed a right to appoint her benefit before Mrs. Bracegirdle's, whose partizans insisted upon her precedence, not only from long prescription, but superior merit. It was at last settled that the rival queens should fix on a favourite character, to be acted by them alternately; the part chosen was *Mrs. Brittle*, in the "Amorous Widow," and the preference of the public appeared so strongly in favour of Mrs. Oldfield, that her mortified rival abandoned the theatre, and never played

(1) The "Royal Convert" of Rowe was played in 1708, when the part of *Ethelinda* was acted by Mrs. Oldfield; from which circumstance we may conclude that Mrs. Bracegirdle was not upon the stage, as Rowe, otherwise, would certainly have given it to her.

by the single merit of any one actor : whether their Baron or our Betterton, might be the superior, (take which side you please) that point reaches, either way, but to a thirteenth part of what I contend for, *viz.* that no stage, at any one period, could show thirteen actors, standing all in equal lights of excellence, in their profession : and I am the bolder in this challenge to any other nation, because no theatre having so extended a variety of natural characters, as the English, can have 'a demand for actors of such various capacities ; why then, where they could not be equally wanted, should we suppose them, at any one time to have existed ?

How imperfect soever this copious account of them may be, I am not without hope, at least, it may in some degree show, what talents are requisite to make actors valuable ; and if that may anyways inform or assist the judgment of future spectators, it may as often be of service to their public entertainments ; for as their hearers are, so will actors be ; worse or better, as the false or true taste applauds or discommends them. Hence only can our theatres improve, or must degenerate.

There is another point, relating to the hard condition of those who write for the stage, which I would recommend to the consideration of their hearers ; which is, that the extreme severity with which they damn a bad play, seems too terrible a warning to those whose untried genius might hereafter give them a good one : whereas it might be a temptation to a latent author, to make the experiment, could he be sure that, though not approved, his muse might, at

again, but for Betterton's benefit. Congreve bequeathed a legacy of £200 to Mrs. Bracegirdle, who retired to the house of Mr. Chute, a few years previous to her death, which happened in 1748, just before she attained the age of eighty-five.

least, be dismissed with decency : but the vivacity of our modern critics is of late grown so riotous, that an unsuccessful author has no more mercy shown him, than a notorious cheat in a pillory ; every fool, the lowest member of the mob, becomes a wit, and will have a fling at him. They come now to a new play, like hounds to a carcase, and are all in a full cry, sometimes for an hour together, before the curtain rises, to throw it amongst them. Surely, those gentlemen cannot but allow, that a play condemned after a fair hearing, falls with thrice the ignominy, as when it is refused that common justice.

But when their critical interruptions grow so loud, and of so long a continuance, that the attention of a quiet people (though not so complete critics) is terrified, and the skill of the actors quite disconcerted by the tumult, the play then seems rather to fall by assassins, than by a lawful sentence. Is it possible that such auditors can receive delight, or think it any praise to them, to prosecute so injurious, so unmanly a treatment ? And though, perhaps, the compassionate, on the other side, (who know they have as good a right to clap and support, as others have to catcall, damn, and destroy,) may oppose this oppression, their good-nature, alas ! contributes little to the redress : for in this sort of civil war, the unhappy author, like a good prince, while his subjects are at mortal variance, is sure to be a loser by a victory on either side ; for still the commonwealth, his play, is, during the conflict, torn to pieces. While this is the case, while the theatre is so turbulent a sea, and so infested with pirates, what poetical merchant, of any substance, will venture to trade in it ? If these valiant gentlemen pretend to be lovers of plays, why will they deter gentlemen from giving them such as are fit for gentlemen to see ? In a word, this new race of critics seem to me, like the lion-whelps in the Tower, who are so boisterously

gamesome at their meals, that they dash down the bowls of milk, brought for their own breakfast.

As a good play is certainly the most rational, and the highest entertainment that human invention can produce, let that be my apology (if I need any) for having thus freely delivered my mind, in behalf of those gentlemen, who, under such calamitous hazards, may hereafter be reduced to write for the stage, whose case I shall compassionate, from the same motive that prevailed on Dido to assist the Trojans in distress.

Non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco.

or, as Dryden has it,

I learn to pity woes so like my own.

If those particular gentlemen have sometimes made me the humbled object of their wit and humour, their triumph at least has done me this involuntary service, that it has driven me a year or two sooner into a quiet life, than, otherwise, my own want of judgment might have led me to: I left the stage before my strength left me, and though I came to it again, for some few days, a year or two after; my reception there not only turned to my account,\* but seemed a fair invitation that I would make my visits more frequent: but, to give over a winner, can be no very imprudent resolution.

\* Mr. Cibber is said to have netted fifty guineas a night by these fugitive performances; perhaps the largest remuneration, considering the relative value of money, that ever was granted to a theatrical performer. His last appearance was in 1744, but the period he alludes to was in the season of 1738, when he agreed with Fleetwood, the proprietor of Drury-lane, to represent *Richard, Fondlewife, Sir John Brute*, and a few more of his favourite characters.



## CHAP. VI.

*The author's first step upon the stage.—His discouragements.—The best actors in Europe ill-used.—A revolution in their favour.—King William grants them a license to act in Lincoln's-inn-fields.—The author's distress, in being thought a worse actor than a poet.—Reduced to write a part for himself.—His success.—More remarks upon theatrical action.—Some upon himself.*

HAVING given you the state of the theatre at my first admission to it, I am now drawing towards the several revolutions it suffered in my own time. But, as you find (by the setting out of my history) that I always intended myself the hero of it, it may be necessary to let you know me, in my obscurity, as well as in my higher light, when I became one of the theatrical triumvirate.

The patentees, who were now masters of this united, and only company of comedians, seemed to make it a rule, that no young persons, desirous to be actors, should be admitted into pay under, at least, half a year's probation; wisely knowing, that how early soever they might be approved of, there could be no great fear of losing them, while they had, then, no other market to go to. But, alas! pay was the least of my concern; the joy and privilege of every day seeing plays for nothing, I thought was a sufficient consideration for the best of my services. So that it was no pain to my patience, that I waited full three quarters of a year,

before I was taken into a salary of ten shillings per week ;\* which, with the assistance of food and raiment, at my father's house, I then thought a most plentiful accession, and myself the happiest of mortals.

The first thing that enters into the head of a young actor, is that of being a hero : in this ambition I was soon snubbed, by the insufficiency of my voice ; to which might be added, an uninformed, meagre person, though then not ill-made, with a dismal, pale complexion. Under these disadvantages, I had but a melancholy prospect of ever playing a lover with Mrs. Bracegirdle, which I had flattered my hopes, that my youth might one day have recommended me to. What was most promising in me, then, was the aptness of my ear ; for I was soon allowed to speak justly, though what was grave and serious, did not equally become me. The first part, therefore, in which I appeared with any glimpse of success, was the *Chaplain*, in the "Orphan"

\* The manner in which Mr. Cibber obtained this trifling salary, is thus pleasantly related by Mr. Davies, in the "Dramatic Miscellanies :"

"Mr. Richard Cross, late prompter of Drury-lane theatre, gave me the following history of Colley Cibber's first establishment as a hired actor. He was known only, for some years, by the name of Master Colley. After waiting impatiently a long time for the prompter's notice, by good fortune he obtained the honour of carrying a message on the stage, in some play, to Betterton. Whatever was the cause, Master Colley was so terrified, that the scene was disconcerted by him. Betterton asked, in some anger, who the young fellow was that committed the blunder. Downs replied, "Master Colley."—"Master Colley ! then forfeit him."—"Why, sir," said the prompter, "he has no salary."—"No !" said the old man ; "why then put him down ten shillings a-week, and forfeit him five."—Vol. 3, p. 417.

of Otway. There is in this character\* (of one scene only) a decent pleasantry, and sense enough to show an audience, whether the actor has any himself. Here was the first applause I ever received, which, you may be sure, made my heart leap with a higher joy, than may be necessary to describe; and yet my transport was not then half so high, as at what Goodman (who had now left the stage) said of me, the next day, in my hearing. Goodman often came to a rehearsal for amusement, and having sat out the "*Orphan*," the day before, in a conversation with some of the principal actors, inquired what new young fellow that was, whom he had seen in the *Chaplain*? Upon which, Mountfort replied, "That's he, behind you." Goodman then turning about, looked earnestly at me, and, after some pause, clapping me on the shoulder, rejoined, "If he does not make a good actor, I'll be d—'d!" The surprise of being commended by one who had been himself so eminent on the stage, and in so positive a manner, was more than I could support; in a word, it almost took away my breath, and (laugh, if you please) fairly drew tears from my eyes. And, though it may be as ridiculous as incredible, to tell you what a full vanity and content at that time possessed me, I will still make it a question whether Alexander himself, or Charles the Twelfth of Sweden, when at the head of their first victorious armies, could feel a greater transport in their bosoms, than I did then in mine, when but in the rear of this troop of comedians. You see to what low particulars I

\* This part was originally played by Percival, a respectable actor, who came into the duke's company about the year 1673. Mr. Cibber's first appearance must have been made before the death of Mountfort, in December 1692; which I merely mention to regulate the error of Mr. Wewitzer's dramatic chronology, which places it in 1696.

am forced to descend, to give you a true resemblance of the early and lively follies of my mind. Let me give you another instance of my discretion, more desperate than that of preferring the stage to any other views of life. One might think that the madness of breaking from the advice and care of parents to turn player, could not easily be exceeded : but what think you, sir, of—matrimony, which, before I was two-and-twenty, I actually committed, when I had but twenty pounds a-year, which my father had assured to me, and twenty shillings a-week for my theatrical labours, to maintain, as I then thought, the happiest young couple that ever took a leap in the dark ? If, after this, to complete my fortune, I turned poet, too, this last folly, indeed, had something a better excuse—necessity : had it never been my lot to have come on the stage, 'tis probable I might never have been inclined or reduced to have written for it : but having once exposed my person there, I thought it could be no additional dishonour to let my parts, whatever they were, take their fortune along with it.—But, to return to the progress I made as an actor.

Queen Mary having commanded the “Double Dealer” to be acted, Kynaston happened to be so ill, that he could not hope to be able next day to perform his part of *Lord Touchwood*. In this exigence, the author, Mr. Congreve, advised it might be given to me, if, at so short a warning, I would undertake it. The flattery of being thus distinguished by so celebrated an author, and the honour to act before a queen, you may be sure, made me blind to whatever difficulties might attend it. I accepted the part, and was ready in it before I slept ; next day the queen was present at the play, and was received with a new prologue from the author, spoken by Mrs. Barry, humbly acknowledging the great honour done to the stage, and to his play

in particular ; two lines of it, which though I have not since read, I still remember.

But never were in Rome nor Athens seen,  
So fair a circle, or so bright a queen.

After the play, Mr. Congreve made me the compliment of saying, that I had not only answered, but had exceeded his expectations, and that he would show me he was sincere, by his saying more of me to the masters.—He was as good as his word, and the next pay-day, I found my salary of fifteen, was then advanced to twenty shillings a-week. But, alas ! this favourable opinion of Mr. Congreve made no farther impression upon the judgment of my good masters ; it only served to heighten my own vanity ; but could not recommend me to any new trials of my capacity ; not a step farther could I get, till the company was again divided ; when the desertion of the best actors left a clear stage, for younger champions to mount, and show their best pretensions to favour. But it is now time to enter upon those facts, that immediately preceded this remarkable revolution of the theatre.

You have seen how complete a set of actors were under the government of the united patents in 1690 ; if their gains were not extraordinary, what shall we impute it to, but some extraordinary ill-management ? I was then too young to be in their secrets, and therefore can only observe upon what I saw, and have since thought visibly wrong.

Though the success of the “ *Prophetess*,\* ” and “ *King Arthur*,† ” (two dramatic operas, in which the patentees

\* The tragical history of that title, altered by Betterton from Beaumont and Fletcher, in 1690, and made into an opera for the music of Purcel.

“ It gratified the expectations,” says Downs, “ of court and city ; and got the author great reputation.”

† “ ‘ *King Arthur*,’ an opera wrote by Mr. Dryden. It was ex-

had embarked all their hopes) was, in appearance, very great, yet their whole receipts did not so far balance their expense, as to keep them out of a large debt, which it was publicly known was, about this time, contracted, and which found work for the court of Chancery for about twenty years following, till one side of the cause grew weary. But this was not all that was wrong; every branch of the theatrical trade had been sacrificed to the necessary fitting out those tall ships of burthen, that were to bring home the Indies. Plays, of course, were neglected, actors held cheap, and slightly dressed, while singers and dancers were better paid, and embroidered. These measures, of course, created murmurings on one side, and ill-humour and contempt on the other. When it became necessary, therefore, to lessen the charge, a resolution was taken to begin with the salaries of the actors; and what seemed to make this resolution more necessary at this time, was the loss of Nokes, Mountfort, and Leigh, who all died about the same year: no wonder, then, if when these great pillars were at once removed, the building grew weaker, and the audiences very much abated. Now in this distress, what more natural remedy could be found, than to incite and encourage (though with some hazard) the industry of the surviving actors? But the patentees, it seems, thought the surer way was to bring down their pay in proportion to the fall of their audiences. To make this project more feasible, they proposed to begin at the head of them, rightly judging, that if the principals acquiesced, their inferiors would murmur in vain. To bring

cellently adorned with scenes and machines: the musical part set by the famous Mr. Henry Purcel, and dances made by Mr. Jo Priest: the play and music pleased the court and city, and being well performed, 'twas very gainful to the company."—"Roscius Anglicanus." It was produced in 1691.

this about with a better grace, they, under pretence of bringing younger actors forward, ordered several of Betterton's and Mrs. Barry's chief parts to be given to young Powel,\* and Mrs. Bracegirdle. In this they committed two palpable errors; for while the best actors are in health, and still on the stage, the public is always apt to be out of humour, when those of a lower class pretend to stand in their places; or admitting, at this time, they might have been accepted, this project might very probably have lessened, but could not possibly mend an audience; and was a sure loss of that time, in studying, which might have been better employed in giving the auditor variety, the only temptation to a palled appetite; and variety is only to be given by industry: but industry will always be lame, when the actor has reason to be discontented. This the patentees did not consider, or pretended not to value, while they thought their power secure and uncontrollable: but, farther, their first project did not succeed; for though the giddy head of Powel accepted the parts of Betterton, Mrs. Bracegirdle had a different way of thinking, and desired to be excused from those of Mrs. Barry; her good sense was not to be misled by the insidious favour of the patentees; she knew the stage was wide enough for her success, without entering into any such rash and invidious competition with Mrs. Barry, and therefore wholly refused acting any part that properly belonged to her. But this proceeding, however, was warning enough to make Betterton be upon his guard, and to alarm others with apprehensions of their own safety, from the design that was laid against him: Betterton, upon this, drew

\* Mr. Powel, sen. is mentioned by Downs, as following the fortunes of Mohun, in his opposition to the united companies. He was father to the actor now mentioned, and died, according to Gildon, about the year 1698.

into his party most of the valuable actors, who, to secure their unity, entered with him into a sort of association, to stand or fall together. All this the patentees for some time slighted, but when matters drew towards a crisis, they found it advisable to take the same measures, and accordingly opened an association on their part ; both which were severally signed, as the interest or inclination of either side led them.

During these contentions, which the impolitic patentees had raised against themselves, (not only by this I have mentioned, but by many other grievances which my memory retains not) the actors offered a treaty of peace ; but their masters imagining no consequence could shake the right of their authority, refused all terms of accommodation. In the meantime, this dissention was so prejudicial to their daily affairs, that I remember it was allowed by both parties, that before Christmas, the patent had lost the getting of at least a thousand pounds by it.

My having been a witness of this unnecessary rupture, was of great use to me, when, many years after, I came to be a manager myself. I laid it down as a settled maxim, that no company could flourish while the chief actors and the undertakers were at variance. I therefore made it a point, while it was possible upon tolerable terms, to keep the valuable actors in humour with their station ; and though I was as jealous of their encroachments as any of my co-partners could be, I always guarded against the least warmth, in my expostulations with them ; not but at the same time they might see, I was perhaps more determined in the question, than those that gave a loose to their resentment, and, when they were cool, were as apt to recede. I do not remember that ever I made a promise to any, that I did not keep, and therefore was cautious how I made them. This coldness, though it might not please, at least left them no-



thing to reproach me with ; and if temper and fair words could prevent a disobligation, I was sure never to give offence, or receive it. But as I was but one of three, I could not oblige others to observe the same conduct. However, by this means, I kept many an unreasonable discontent from breaking out, and both sides found their account in it.

How a contemptuous and overbearing manner of treating actors had like to have ruined us, in our early prosperity, shall be shown in its place : if future managers should chance to think my way right, I suppose they will follow it ; if not, when they find what happened to the patentees, (who chose to disagree with their people) perhaps they may think better of it.

The patentees, then, who, by their united powers, had made a monopoly of the stage, and consequently presumed they might impose what conditions they pleased upon their people, did not consider, that they were all this while endeavouring to enslave a set of actors, whom the public (more arbitrary than themselves) were inclined to support ; nor did they reflect that the spectator naturally wished that the actor, who gave him delight, might enjoy the profits arising from his labour, without regard of what pretended damage, or injustice, might fall upon his owners, whose personal merit the public was not so well acquainted with. From this consideration, then, several persons of the highest distinction espoused their cause, and sometimes, in the circle, entertained the king with the state of the theatre. At length their grievances were laid before the Earl of Dorset, then Lord Chamberlain, who took the most effectual method for their relief.\* The learned of the law were advised with,

\* Mr. Davies has the following elucidatory note upon this occurrence :

“ The generous Dorset introduced Betterton, Mrs. Barry, Mrs.

and they gave their opinion, that no patent for acting plays, &c. could tie up the hands of a succeeding prince from granting the like authority, where it might be thought proper to trust it. But while this affair was in agitation,\* Queen Mary died, which, of course, occasioned a cessation of all public diversions. In this melancholy interim, Betterton and his adherents had more leisure to solicit their redress ; and the patentees now finding that the party against them was gathering strength, were reduced to make sure of as good a company, as the leavings of Betterton's interest could form ; and these, you may be sure, would not lose this occasion of setting a price upon their merit, equal to their own opinion of it, which was but just double to what they had before. Powel and Verbruggen, who had then but forty shillings a week, were now raised each of them to four pounds, and others in proportion : as for myself, I was then too insignificant to be taken into their councils, and

Bracegirdle, and others, to the king, who granted them an audience. William, though deficient in the charm of affability and condescension, with which Charles, his uncle, captivated all who approached him, was yet ready to extend his favour to the players. He was not displeased to see in his presence, two such wonders in the theatrical world as Betterton and Mrs. Barry, whose keen expressive look commanded attention and respect. William, who had freed all the subjects of England from slavery, except the inhabitants of the mimical world, rescued them also from the insolence and tyranny of their oppressors."—"Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, page 394.

It is a fact which has been strangely overlooked, that Sir Robert Howard was mainly instrumental in procuring the license by which these comedians were relieved.(1)

\* In 1694.

(1) "Roscius Anglicanus."

consequently stood among those of little importance, like cattle in a market, to be sold to the first bidder. But the patentees seeming in the greater distress for actors, condescended to purchase me. Thus, without any farther merit, than that of being a scarce commodity, I was advanced to thirty shillings a-week: yet our company was so far from being full, that our commanders were forced to beat up for volunteers in several distant counties; and it was this occasion that first brought Jonson\* and Bullock† to the service of the theatre royal.

\* This excellent actor, who was familiarly known by the appellation of his great namesake, Ben Jonson, came into the theatre royal, from an itinerant company, as Mr. Cibber relates, about the year 1694. He was bred a sign painter, but took more pleasure in hearing the actors, than in handling his pencil or spreading his colours, and, as he used to say in his merry mood, left the saint's occupation at last to take that of the sinner.

Jonson's merit was evinced as *Sir William Wisewould*, in Cibber's comedy of "Love's Last Shift," 4to, 1696; but I find him first mentioned by Downs, for *Justice Wary*, in Caryl's "Sir Salomon;" the old prompter, in a species of postscript to his valuable tract, then terms him "a true copy of Mr. Underhill," and instances his *Morose*, *Corbaccio*, and *Sir Hotthead*, as very admirable efforts. Jonson passed over to the management of old Swiney, in 1706, with other members of Betterton's company, and established a very high reputation by his chaste and studied manner of acting. When Rich, in 1715, opened his new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, Booth, Wilks, and Cibber, the managers of Drury-lane, solicitous to retain in their service comedians of merit, paid a particular respect to Johnson, by investing him with such parts of Dogget, who had taken leave of them, as were adapted to his powers. Here he continued with fame and profit, till August, 1742, when he expired in the seventy-seventh year of his age. Mr. Davies, who appears to have been familiar with his excellencies, has given a description of Jonson,

Forces being thus raised, and the war declared on both sides, Betterton and his chiefs had the honour of an audi-

which, for its evident taste and candour, I shall do myself the pleasure to transcribe.

“That chaste copier of nature, Ben Jonson, the comedian, for above forty years, gave a true picture of an arch clown in the *Grave-digger*. His jokes and repartees had a strong effect from his seeming insensibility of their force. His large, speaking, blue eyes he fixed steadily on the person to whom he spoke, and was never known to have wandered from the stage to any part of the theatre.”

In the second volume of Mr. Victor’s notes upon the stage, I find the following corroboration of this actor’s merits :

“Jonson was a comedian that all the critics allowed to have the sterling *vis comica*. He was most happily adapted to all the characters he appeared in. He was one of those comedians, who, like the incomparable Nokes, could give life to many comedies that existed only by their extraordinary performances. The *Morose*, in the “*Silent Woman*,” was one that died with this great actor. His steady countenance never betrayed the least symptom of the joke he was going to give utterance to. His decent mien (never exaggerated by dress or conduct) made him, at all times, appear the real man he represented.”

† This excellent actor came to London, as we see, about 1694, deriving his engagement from the distress in which Drury-lane theatre was involved by the desertion of Betterton, and other principal performers. He quitted this establishment in 1714, owing, as Mr. Cibber insinuates, to the ungovernable temper of Wilks; and passed over to John Rich, at the opening of Lincoln’s-inn-fields. He is first mentioned by Downs, for the *Host*, in Shakspeare’s “*Merry Wives of Windsor*,” and appears to be pointed at in Dennis’s “*Epistle Dedicatory*” to the “*Comical Gallant*,” where the irascible writer thus addresses the Hon. George Granville :—

“Falstaff’s part, which you know to be the principal one of the play,

ence of the king, who considered them as the only subjects whom he had not yet delivered from arbitrary power ; and graciously dismissed them, with an assurance of relief, and support. Accordingly, a select number of them were empowered by his royal license, to act in a separate theatre for themselves. This great point being obtained, many people of quality came into a voluntary subscription of twenty, and some of forty guineas a-piece, for erecting a theatre within the walls of the Tennis-court, in Lincoln's Inn Fields. But as it required time to fit it up, it gave the

and that which on all the rest depends, was by no means acted to the satisfaction of the audience, upon which several fell from disliking the action, to disapproving the play."

This piece was printed in 1702, as acted "at the Theatre Royal in Drury-lane;" with a list of the *dramatis personæ*, but the names of the actors not annexed. Bullock, however, sustained the part of *Sir Tunbelly Clumsy*, in Vanbrugh's "Relapse," which had been previously performed under the same auspices, and from its nature, most probably by the same actor.

William Bullock was a comedian of great glee and much vivacity, and in his person large, with a lively countenance, full of humorous information. Steele, in the "Tattler," with his usual kind sensibility, very often adverts to Bullock's faculty of exciting amusement, but sometimes censures his habit of interpolation. (1) In Gildon's "Comparison between the Two Stages," 1702, he is termed the "best comedian since Nokes and Leigh, and a fellow that has a very humble opinion of himself." Bullock's abilities have been ratified by the sanction of Macklin, who denominated him a true theatrical genius ; and Mr. Davies saw him act several parts with great applause, and particularly the *Spanish Friar*, when beyond the age of eighty. He died on the 18th of June, 1733.

(1) "You'll have Pinkethman and Bullock helping out Beaumont and Fletcher."—"Tattler," No. 89.

patentees more leisure to muster their forces, who, not withstanding, were not able to take the field till the Easter Monday in April following. Their first attempt was a revived play, called "Abdelazar; or, the Moor's Revenge," poorly written, by Mrs. Behn. The house was very full, but whether it was the play or the actors that were not approved, the next day's audience sunk to nothing. However, we were assured, that let the audiences be never so low, our masters would make good all deficiencies, and so indeed they did, till towards the end of the season, when dues to balance came too thick upon them. But that I may go gradually on with my own fortune, I must take this occasion to let you know, by the following circumstance, how very low my capacity, as an actor, was then rated. It was thought necessary, at our opening, that the town should be addressed in a new prologue; but to our great distress, among several that were offered, not one was judged fit to be spoken. This I thought a favourable occasion to do myself some remarkable service, if I should have the good fortune to produce one that might be accepted. The next (memorable) day my muse brought forth her first fruit that was ever made public; how good or bad imports not; my prologue was accepted, and resolved on to be spoken. This point being gained, I began to stand upon terms, you will say, not unreasonable; which were, that if I might speak it myself, I would expect no farther reward for my labour: this was judged as bad as having no prologue at all. You may imagine how hard I thought it, that they durst not trust my poor poetical brat to my own care. But since I found it was to be given into other hands, I insisted that two guineas should be the price of my parting with it; which with a sigh I received, and Powel spoke the prologue: but every line, that was applauded, went sorely to my heart, when I reflected, that

the same praise might have been given to my own speaking ; nor could the success of the author compensate the distress of the actor. However, in the end, it served, in some sort, to mend our people's opinion of me ; and whatever the critics might think of it, one of the patentees, (who, it is true, knew no difference between Dryden and D'Urfey,) said, upon the success of it, that, in sooth, I was an ingenious young man. This sober compliment, (though I could have no reason to be vain upon it,) I thought was a fair promise to my being in favour. But to matters of more moment : now let us reconnoitre the enemy.

After we had stolen some few days' march upon them, the forces of Betterton came up with us in terrible order. In about three weeks following, the new theatre was opened against us, with a veteran company, and a new train of artillery ; or in plainer English, the old actors, in Lincoln's Inn Fields began with a new comedy of Mr. Congreve's, called " Love for Love ;" \* which ran on with such extraordinary success, that they had seldom occasion to act any other play, till the end of the season. This valuable play had a narrow escape from falling into the hands of the patentees ; for, before the division of the company, it had been read, and accepted of at the theatre royal : but while the articles of agreement for it were preparing, the rupture in the theatrical state was so far advanced, that the author took time to pause before he signed them ; when finding that all hopes of accommodation were impracticable, he thought it advisable to let it take its fortune with those actors for whom he had first intended the parts.

Mr. Congreve was then in such high reputation as an author, that, besides his profits from this play, they offered him a whole share† with them, which he accepted ; and in con-

\* Produced on the 30th of April, 1695.

† In Shakspeare's time the nightly expenses for lights, supernumer-

sideration of which he obliged himself, if his health permitted, to give them one new play every year. Dryden, in King Charles's time, had the same share with the king's company; but he bound himself to give them two plays every season.\* This, you may imagine, he could not hold

aries, etc., was but forty-five shillings, and having deducted this charge, the clear emoluments were divided into shares, (supposed to be forty in number,) between the proprietors, and principal actors. In the year 1666, the whole profit arising from acting plays, masques, etc., at the king's theatre, was divided into twelve shares and three quarters, of which Mr. Killegrew, the manager, had two shares and three quarters, each share computed to produce about £250, net, per annum. In Sir William D'Avenant's company, from the time their new theatre was opened in Portugal-row, the total receipt, after deducting the nightly expenses, was divided into fifteen shares, of which it was agreed that ten should belong to D'Avenant, for various purposes, and the remainder be divided among the male members of his troops according to their rank and merit. I cannot relate the arrangement adopted by Betterton in Lincoln's-inn-fields, but the share accepted by Congreve was, doubtless, presumed to be of considerable value.

\* Dryden had a share and a quarter in the king's company, for which he bound himself to furnish not two, but three plays every season. The following paper, which, after remaining long in the Killegrew family, came into the hands of the late Mr. Reed, and was published by Mr. Malone in his "Historical Account of the English Stage," incontestibly proves the practice alluded to. The superscription is lost, but it was probably addressed to the lord-chamberlain, or the king, about the year 1678, "*Œdipus*," the ground of complaint, being printed in 1679 :

Whereas upon Mr. Dryden's binding himself to write three playes a yeere, lce the said Mr. Dryden was admitted and continued as a sharer in the king's playhouse for diverse years, and received for his share and a quarter three or four hundred pounds, communibus annis; but though he received



long, and, I am apt to think, he might have served them better with one in a year, not so hastily written. Mr. Congreve, whatever impediment he met with, was three\* years before, in pursuance to his agreement, he produced the "Mourning Bride;" and, if I mistake not, the interval had been much the same, when he gave them the "Way

the moneys, we received not the playes, not one in a year. After which, the house being burnt, the company in building another, contracted great debts, so that shares fell much short of what they were formerly. Thereupon Mr. Dryden complaining to the company of his want of profit, the company was so kind to him that they not only did not presse him for the playes which he so engaged to write for them, and for which he was paid beforehand, but they did also at his earnest request give him a third day for his last new play called "All for Love;" and at the receipt of the money for the said third day, he acknowledged it as a gift, and a particular kindness of the company. Yet notwithstanding this kind proceeding, Mr. Dryden has now, jointly with Mr. Lee, (who was in pension with us to the last day of our playing, and shall continue,) written a play called "Œdipus," and given it to the duke's company, contrary to his said agreement, his promise, and all gratitude, to the great prejudice and almost undoing of the company, they being the only poets remaining to us. Mr. Crowne, being under the like agreement with the duke's house, wrote a play called the "Destruction of Jerusalem," and being forced by their refusal of it, to bring it to us, the said company compelled us, after the studying of it, and a vast expence in scenes and cloaths, to buy off their clayme, by paying all the pension he had received from them, amounting to one hundred and twelve pounds paid by the king's company, besides near forty pounds he the said Mr. Crowne paid out of his owne pocket.

These things considered, if notwithstanding Mr. Dryden's said agreement, promise, and moneys freely given him for his said last new play, and the many titles we have to his writings, this play be judged away from us, we must submit.

(Signed) Charles Killebrew.  
Charles Hart.  
Rich. Burt.  
Cardell Goodman.  
Mic. Mohun.

\* Only two years, the "Mourning Bride" being printed in 1697.

of the World.”\* But it came out the stronger for the time it cost him, and to their better support, when they sorely wanted it: for though they went on with success for a year or two, and even, when their affairs were declining, stood in much higher estimation with the public, than their opponents; yet, in the end, both sides were great sufferers by their separation; the natural consequence of two houses, which I have already mentioned in a former chapter.

The first error this new colony of actors fell into, was their inconsiderately parting with Williams, and Mrs. Mountfort, upon a too nice, not to say severe, punctilio; in not allowing them to be equal sharers with the rest; which, before they had acted one play, occasioned their return to the service of the patentees. As I have called this an error, I ought to give my reasons for it. Though the industry of Williams was not equal to his capacity, for he loved his bottle better than his business; and though Mrs. Mountfort was only excellent in comedy, yet their merit was too great, almost on any scruples, to be added to the enemy; and; at worst, they were certainly much more above those they would have ranked them with, than they could possibly be under those, they were not admitted to be equal to. Of this fact there is a poetical record, in the prologue to “*Love for Love*,” where the author, speaking of the, then, happy state of the stage, observes that, if in Paradise, when two only were there, they both fell, the surprise was less, if, from so numerous a body as theirs, there had been any deserters:

Forbear your† wonder, and the fault forgive,  
If, in our larger family, we grieve  
One falling Adam, and one tempted Eve.

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\* Published, 4to, 1700.

† Mr. Cibber, with his usual inaccuracy, reads here,

*Abate the wonder, etc.*

These lines alluded to the revolt of the persons above-mentioned.

Notwithstanding the acquisition of these two actors, who were of more importance than any of those to whose assistance they came, the affairs of the patentees were still in a very creeping condition ; they were now, too late, convinced of their error in having provoked their people to this civil war of the theatre : quite changed, and dismal, now, was the prospect before them : their houses thin, and the town crowding into a new one ; actors at double salaries, and not half the usual audiences to pay them ; and all this brought upon them by those whom their full security had contemned, and who were now in a fair way of making their fortunes, upon the ruined interest of their oppressors.

Here, though at this time my fortune depended on the success of the patentees, I cannot help, in regard to truth, remembering the rude and riotous havoc we made of all the late dramatic honours of the theatre. All became at once the spoil of ignorance and self-conceit. Shakspeare was defaced and tortured in every signal character ; *Hamlet* and *Othello* lost, in one hour, all their good sense, their dignity, and fame ; *Brutus* and *Cassius* became noisy blusterers, with bold unmeaning eyes, mistaken sentiments, and turgid elocution. Nothing, surely, could more painfully regret\* a judicious spectator, than to see, at our first setting out, with what rude confidence, those habits, which actors of real merit had left behind them, were worn by giddy pretenders, that so vulgarly disgraced them ! Not young lawyers in hired robes and plumes, at a masquerade, could be less what they would seem, or more awkwardly person-

\* Mr. Cibber's usage of the verb *regret* here, may be said to confirm the censure of Fielding, who urged, in reviewing some other of his inadvertencies, that it was " needless for a great writer to understand his grammar."

ate the characters they belonged to. If, in all these acts of wanton waste, these insults upon injured nature, you observe I have not yet charged one of them upon myself; it is not from an imaginary vanity, that I could have avoided them; but that I was rather safe, by being too low, at that time, to be admitted even to my chance of falling into the same eminent errors: so that as none of those great parts ever fell to my share, I could not be accountable for the execution of them. Nor, indeed, could I get one good part of any kind, till many months after; unless it were of that sort which no body else cared for, or would venture to expose themselves in. The first unintended favour, therefore, of a part of any value, necessity threw upon me, on the following occasion.

As it has been always judged their natural interest, where there are two theatres, to do one another as much mischief as they can; you may imagine it could not be long, before this hostile policy showed itself in action. It happened, upon our having information on a Saturday morning, that the Tuesday after, "Hamlet" was intended to be acted at the other house, where it had not yet been seen; our merry managing actors, (for they were now in a manner left to govern themselves) resolved, at any rate, to steal a march upon the enemy, and take possession of the same play the day before them: accordingly, "Hamlet" was given out that night, to be acted with us on Monday. The notice of this sudden enterprise soon reached the other house, who, in my opinion, too much regarded it; for they shortened their first orders, and resolved that "Hamlet" should to "Hamlet" be opposed on the same day; whereas, had they given notice in their bills, that the same play would have been acted by them the day after, the town would have been in no doubt, which house they should have reserved themselves for; ours must certainly have been empty, and

theirs, with more honour, have been crowded : experience, many years after, in like cases, has convinced me, that this would have been the more laudable conduct. But, be that as it may, when, in their Monday's bills, it was seen that "Hamlet" was up against us, our consternation was terrible, to find that so hopeful a project was frustrated. In this distress, Powel, who was our commanding officer, and whose enterprising head wanted nothing but skill to carry him through the most desperate attempts ; (for, like others of his cast, he had murdered many a hero, only to get into his clothes.) this Powel, I say, immediately called a council of war ; where the question was, whether he should fairly face the enemy, or make a retreat, to some other play of more probable safety ? It was soon resolved, that to act "Hamlet" against "Hamlet," would be certainly throwing away the play, and disgracing themselves to little or no audience ; to conclude, Powel, who was vain enough to envy Betterton, as his rival, proposed to change plays with them, and that as they had given out the "Old Bachelor," and had changed it for "Hamlet," against us, we should give up our "Hamlet," and turn the "Old Bachelor" upon them. This motion was agreed to, *nemine contradicente* ; but, upon inquiry, it was found, that there were not two persons among them, who had ever acted in that play : but that objection, it seems, (though all the parts were to be studied in six hours) was soon got over ; Powel had an equivalent, *in petto*, that would balance any deficiency on that score ; which was, that he would play the *Old Bachelor* himself, and mimic Betterton, throughout the whole part. This happy thought was approved with delight and applause, as whatever can be supposed to ridicule merit, generally gives joy to those that want it : accordingly, the bills were changed, and at the bottom inserted,

The part of the *Old Bachelor*, to be performed in imitation of the original.

Printed books of the play were sent for in haste, and every actor had one, to pick out of it the part he had chosen : thus, while they were each of them chewing the morsel they had most mind to, some one happening to cast his eye over the *dramatis personæ*, found that the main matter was still forgot, that no body had yet been thought of for the part of *Alderman Fondlewife*. Here we were all aground again ; nor was it to be conceived who could make the least tolerable shift with it. This character had been so admirably acted by Dogget, that though it is only seen in the fourth act, it may be no dispraise to the play, to say, it probably owed the greatest part of its success to his performance. But, as the case was now desperate, any resource was better than none ; somebody must swallow the bitter pill, or the play must die. At last it was recollected, that I had been heard to say in my wild way of talking, what a vast mind I had to play *Nykin*, by which name the character was more frequently called. Notwithstanding they were thus distressed about the disposal of this part, most of them shook their heads, at my being mentioned for it ; yet Powel, who was resolved, at all hazards, to fall upon Betterton, and having no concern for what might become of any one that served his ends or purpose, ordered me to be sent for ; and, as he naturally loved to set other people wrong, honestly said, before I came, “ If the fool has a mind to blow himself up, at once, let us even give him a clear stage for it.” Accordingly, the part was put into my hands, between eleven and twelve that morning, which I durst not refuse, because others were as much straitened in time, for study, as myself. But I had this casual advantage of most of them, that having so constantly observed Dogget’s performance, I wanted but little trouble, to make me perfect in the words ;

so that when it came to my turn to rehearse, while others read their parts, from their books, I had put mine in my pocket, and went through the first scene without it; and though I was more abashed to rehearse so remarkable a part before the actors, (which is natural to most young people) than to act before an audience, yet some of the better-natured encouraged me so far, as to say, they did not think I should make an ill figure in it. To conclude, the curiosity to see Betterton mimicked drew us a pretty good audience, and Powel, (as far as applause is a proof of it) was allowed to have burlesqued him very well. As I have questioned the certain value of applause, I hope I may venture, with less vanity, to say how particular a share I had of it, in the same play. At my first appearance, one might have imagined, by the various murmurs of the audience, that they were in doubt whether Dogget himself were not returned, or that they could not conceive what strange face it could be, that so nearly resembled him; for I had laid the tint of forty years more than my real age, upon my features, and, to the most minute placing of an hair, was dressed exactly like him: when I spoke, the surprise was still greater, as if I had not only borrowed his clothes, but his voice, too. But though that was the least difficult part of him to be imitated, they seemed to allow I had so much of him in every other requisite, that my applause was, perhaps, more than proportionable: for, whether I had done so much, where so little was expected, or that the generality of my hearers were more than usually zealous, upon so unexpected an occasion, or from what other motive such favour might be poured upon me, I cannot say; but, in plain and honest truth, upon my going off from the first scene, a much better actor might have been proud of the applause that followed me; after one loud plaudit was ended, and sunk into a general whisper, that seemed still to continue their private

approbation, it revived to a second, and again to a third, still louder than the former. If to all this I add, that Dogget himself was in the pit at the same time, it would be too rank affectation, if I should not confess, that, to see him there a witness of my reception, was to me, as consummate a triumph as the heart of vanity could be indulged with. But whatever value I might set upon myself, from this unexpected success, I found that was no rule to other people's judgment of me. There were few or no parts, of the same kind, to be had; nor could they conceive, from what I had done in this, what other sort of characters I could be fit for. If I solicited for anything of a different nature, I was answered, "That was not in my way." And what was in my way, it seems, was not as yet resolved upon. And though I replied, "That I thought anything, naturally written, ought to be in every one's way that pretended to be an actor," this was looked upon as a vain, impracticable conceit of my own. Yet it is a conceit, that, in forty years' farther experience, I have not yet given up; I still think, that a painter, who can draw but one sort of object, or an actor that shines but in one light, can neither of them boast of that ample genius, which is necessary to form a thorough master of his art: for, though genius may have a particular inclination, yet a good history painter, or a good actor, will, without being at a loss, give you, upon demand, a proper likeness of whatever nature produces. If he cannot do this, he is only an actor, as the shoemaker was allowed a limited judge of Apelles's painting, but not beyond his last. Now, though to do any one thing well, may have more merit than we often meet with, and may be enough to procure a man the name of a good actor from the public; yet, in my opinion, it is but still the name without the substance. If his talent is in such narrow bounds, that he dares not step out of them, to look upon



the singularities of mankind, and cannot catch them in whatever form they present themselves; if he is not master of the "*quicquid agunt homines*," &c. in any shape human nature is fit to be seen in; if he cannot change himself into several distinct persons, so as to vary his whole tone of voice, his motion, his look, and gesture, whether in high or lower life, and, at the same time, keep close to those variations, without leaving the character they singly belong to; if his best skill falls short of this capacity, what pretence have we to call him a complete master of his art? And though I do not insist that he ought always to show himself in these various lights, yet, before we compliment him with that title, he ought, at least, by some few proofs, to let us see that he has them all in his power. If I am asked who ever arrived at this imaginary excellence, I confess the instances are very few; \* but I will venture to name Mountfort as one of them, whose theatrical character I have given in my last chapter: for, in his youth, he had acted low humour with great success, even down to *Tallboy*, in the "*Jovial Crew*;" and when he was in great esteem as a tragedian, he was, in comedy, the most complete gentleman that I ever saw upon the stage. Let me add, too, that Betterton, in his declining age, was as eminent in *Sir John Falstaff*, as, in the vigour of it, in his *Othello*.

While I thus measure the value of an actor, by the variety of shapes he is able to throw himself into, you may naturally suspect, that I am all this while, leading my own theatrical character into your favour: why, really, to speak as an honest man, I cannot wholly deny it: but in this, I shall endeavour to be no farther partial to myself,

\* Mr. Cibber has not done justice to his own assertion, as the instances are particularly numerous, before his time, in which the leading actors were remarkable for their extreme versatility.

than known facts will make me ; from the good or bad evidence of which, your better judgment will condemn or acquit me. And to show you that I will conceal no truth that is against me, I frankly own, that had I been always left to my own choice of characters, I am doubtful whether I might ever have deserved an equal share of that estimation, which the public seemed to have held me in : nor am I sure that it was not vanity in me, often to have suspected that I was kept out of the parts I had most mind to, by the jealousy or prejudice of my cotemporaries ; some instances of which I could give you, were they not too slight to be remembered : in the meantime, be pleased to observe how slowly, in my younger days, my good-fortune came forward.

My early success in the “ Old Bachelor,” of which I have given so full an account, having opened no farther way to my advancement, was enough, perhaps, to have made a young fellow, of more modesty, despair ; but being of a temper not easily disheartened, I resolved to leave nothing unattempted, that might show me in some new rank of distinction. Having, then, no other resource, I was at last reduced to write a character for myself ; but as that was not finished till about a year after, I could not, in the interim, procure any one part that gave me the least inclination to act it ; and, consequently, such as I got, I performed with a proportionable negligence. But this misfortune, if it were one, you are not to wonder at ; for the same fate attended me, more or less, to the last days of my remaining on the stage. What defect in me this may have been owing to, I have not yet had sense enough to find out, but I soon found out as good a thing, which was, never to be mortified at it ; though I am afraid this seeming philosophy was rather owing to my inclination to pleasure than business. But to my point. The next year I

produced the comedy of "Love's last Shift;"\* yet the difficulty of getting it to the stage was not easily surmounted; for, at that time, as little was expected from me, as an author, as had been from my pretensions to be an actor. However, Mr. Southern, the author of "Oroonoko," having had the patience to hear me read it to him, happened to like it so well, that he immediately recommended it to the patentees, and it was accordingly acted in January, 1695. In this play I gave myself the part of *Sir Novelty*, which was thought a good portrait of the foppery then in fashion. Here, too, Mr. Southern, though he had approved my play, came into the common diffidence of me as an actor; for when, on the first day of it, I was standing, myself, to prompt the prologue, he took me by the hand, and said, "Young man, I pronounce thy play a good one; I will answer for its success, if thou dost not spoil it by thy own action." Though this might be a fair salvo, for his favourable judgment of the play, yet, if it were his real opinion of me, as an actor, I had the good fortune to deceive him. I succeeded so well in both, that people seemed at a loss, which they should give the preference to. But (now let me show a little more vanity, and my apology for it shall come after) the compliment which my Lord Dorset (then Lord Chamberlain) made me upon it, is, I own, what I had rather not suppress; *viz.* that it was the best first play that any author in his memory had produced, and that for a young fellow to show himself such an actor and such a writer, in one day, was something extraordinary. But as this noble lord has been celebrated for his good-nature, I am contented, that as much of this compliment should be supposed to exceed my deserts, as may be imagined to have been heightened by

\* Published in 4to, 1696.

his generous inclination to encourage a young beginner. If this excuse cannot soften the vanity of telling a truth so much in my own favour, I must lie at the mercy of my reader. But there was a still higher compliment passed upon me, which I may publish without vanity, because it was not a designed one, and apparently came from my enemies; *viz.* that, to their certain knowledge, it was not my own.\* This report is taken notice of in my dedication to the play.† If they spoke truth, if they knew what other person it really belonged to, I will, at least, allow them true to their trust, for, forty years have since past, and they have not yet revealed the secret.

The new lights in which the character of *Sir Novelty* had shown me, one might have thought, were enough to have dissipated the doubts, of what I might now be possibly good for. But to whatever chance my ill-fortune was due, whether I had still but little merit, or that the managers, if I had any, were not competent judges of it; or whether I was not generally elbowed by other actors, (which I am most inclined to think the true cause) when any fresh parts were to be disposed of, not one part of any consequence was I preferred to, till the year following: then, indeed, from Sir John Vanbrugh's favourable opinion

\* Dennis, who hated Cibber for obstructing, as he imagined, the progress of one of his tragedies, some years afterwards, in very passionate terms, denied his claim to this comedy. "When the 'Fool in Fashion' was first acted," says the critic, "Cibber was hardly twenty years of age; now could he at the age of twenty, write a comedy with a just design, distinguished characters, and a proper dialogue, who now, at forty, treats us with Hibernian sense, and Hibernian English?"

† This dedication was addressed to Richard Norton, of Southwick, Esq., a gentleman who was so fond of plays and players, that he has been accused of turning his chapel into a theatre.

of me, I began, with others, to have a better of myself: for he not only did me honour, as an author, by writing his "Relapse," as a sequel, or second part, to "Love's last Shift;" but as an actor, too, by preferring me to the chief character in his own play; which, from *Sir Novelty*, he had ennobled by the style of *Baron of Foppington*. This play, (the "Relapse") from its new and easy turn of wit, had great success, and gave me, as a comedian, a second flight of reputation along with it.

As the matter I write must be very flat or impertinent, to those who have no taste or concern for the stage, and may, to those who delight in it, too, be equally tedious when I talk of nobody but myself; I shall endeavour to relieve your patience, by a word or two more of this gentleman, so far as he lent his pen to the support of the theatre.

Though the "Relapse" was the first play this agreeable author produced, yet it was not, it seems, the first he had written; for he had at that time by him (more than) all the scenes, that were acted of the "Provoked Wife;" but being then doubtful, whether he should ever trust them to the stage, he thought no more of it: but after the success of the "Relapse," he was more strongly importuned, than able, to refuse it to the public. Why the last-written play was first acted, and for what reason they were given to different stages, what follows will explain.

In his first step into public life, when he was but an ensign, and had a heart above his income, he happened somewhere, at his winter-quarters, upon a very slender acquaintance with Sir Thomas Skipwith, to receive a particular obligation from him, which he had not forgotten at the time I am speaking of: when Sir Thomas's interest in the theatrical patent (for he had a large share in it, though he little concerned himself in the conduct of it) was rising but very slowly, he thought that, to give it a lift, by a new

comedy, if it succeeded, might be the handsomest return he could make to those his former favours; and having observed, that in "Love's last Shift," most of the actors had acquitted themselves beyond what was expected of them, he took a sudden hint from what he liked in that play, and in less than three months, in the beginning of April following brought us the "Relapse" finished; but the season being then too far advanced, it was not acted till the succeeding winter. Upon the success of the "Relapse," the late Lord Halifax, who was a great favourer of Betterton's company, having formerly, by way of family amusement, heard the "Provoked Wife" read to him, in its looser sheets, engaged Sir John Vanbrugh to revise it, and give it to the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. This was a request not to be refused to so eminent a patron of the muses, as the Lord Halifax, who was equally a friend and admirer of Sir John himself. Nor was Sir Thomas Skipwith in the least disobliged by so reasonable a compliance: after which, Sir John was again at liberty to repeat his civilities to his friend Sir Thomas; and, about the same time, or not long after,\* gave us the comedy of "Æsop;" for his inclination always led him to serve Sir Thomas. Besides, our company, about this time, began to be looked upon in another light; the late contempt we had lain under was now wearing off, and from the success of two or three new plays, our actors, by being originals in a few good parts, where they had not the disadvantage of comparison against them, sometimes found new favour, in those old plays, where others had exceeded them.

Of this good-fortune, perhaps, I had more than my share, from the two very different chief characters I had succeeded in; for I was equally approved in *Æsop*, as the

\* During the same season, 1697.

*Lord Foppington*, allowing the difference to be no less, than as wisdom, in a person deformed, may be less entertaining to the general taste, than folly and foppery finely dressed : for the character that delivers precepts of wisdom, is, in some sort, severe upon the auditor, by showing him one wiser than himself. But when folly is his object, he applauds himself, for being wiser than the coxcomb he laughs at : and who is not more pleased with an occasion to commend, than accuse himself?

Though to write much, in a little time, is no excuse for writing ill ; yet Sir John Vanbrugh's pen is not to be a little admired, for its spirit, ease, and readiness, in producing plays so fast, upon the neck of one another ; for, notwithstanding this quick dispatch, there is a clear and lively simplicity in his wit, that neither wants the ornament of learning, nor has the least smell of the lamp in it. As the face of a fine woman, with only her locks loose about her, may be then in its greatest beauty ; such were his productions, only adorned by nature. There is something so catching to the ear, so easy to the memory, in all he wrote, that it has been observed, by all the actors of my time, that the style of no author whatsoever, gave their memory less trouble, than that of Sir John Vanbrugh ; which I myself, who have been charged with several of his strongest characters, can confirm by a pleasing experience. And, indeed, his wit and humour were so little laboured, that his most entertaining scenes seemed to be no more than his common conversation committed to paper. Here I confess my judgment at a loss, whether, in this, I give him more or less than his due praise. For may it not be more laudable, to raise an estate, whether in wealth or fame, by pains and honest industry, than to be born to it? Yet, if his scenes really were, as to me they always seemed, delightful, are they not, thus expeditiously written, the more sur-

prising? Let the wit and merit of them, then, be weighed by wiser critics than I pretend to be; but no wonder, while his conceptions were so full of life and humour, his muse should be sometimes too warm to wait the slow pace of judgment, or to endure the drudgery of forming a regular fable to them: yet we see the "Relapse," however imperfect in the conduct, by the mere force of its agreeable wit, ran away with the hearts of its hearers; while "Love's last Shift," which, as Mr. Congreve justly said of it, had only in it, a great many things that were like wit, that in reality were not wit; and what is still less pardonable, as I say of it myself, has a great deal of puerility, and frothy stage-language in it, yet by the mere moral delight received from its fable, it has been, with the other, in a continued, and equal possession of the stage, for more than forty years.

As I have already promised you to refer your judgment of me, as an actor, rather to known facts, than my own opinion, which I could not be sure would keep clear of self-partiality, I must a little farther risk my being tedious, to be as good as my word. I have elsewhere allowed that my want of a strong and full voice soon cut short my hopes of making any valuable figure in tragedy; and I have been many years since convinced, that whatever opinion I might have of my own judgment or capacity, to amend the palpable errors that I saw our tragedians, most in favour, commit; yet the auditors who would have been sensible of any such amendments, could I have made them, were so very few, that my best endeavour would have been but an unavailing labour, or, what is yet worse, might have appeared both to our actors, and to many auditors, the vain mistake of my own self-conceit: for so strong, so very near indispensable, is that one article of voice, in the forming a good tragedian, that an actor may want any other qualification whatsoever, and yet have a better chance for ap-



plause, than he will ever have, with all the skill in the world, if his voice is not equal to it. Mistake me not ; I say, for applause only—but applause does not always stay for, nor always follow intrinsic merit ; applause will frequently open, like a young hound, upon a wrong scent ; and the majority of auditors, you know, are generally composed of babblers, that are profuse of their voices, before there is any thing on foot that calls for them : not but, I grant, to lead, or mislead the many, will always stand in some rank of a necessary merit ; yet when I say a good tragedian, I mean one, in opinion of whose real merit the best judges would agree.

Having so far given up my pretensions to the buskin, I ought now to account for my having been, notwithstanding, so often seen, in some particular characters in tragedy, as *Iago*, *Wolsey*, *Syphax*, *Richard the Third*, &c. If in any of this kind I have succeeded, perhaps it has been a merit dearly purchased ; for, from the delight I seemed to take in my performing them, half my auditors have been persuaded that a great share of the wickedness of them must have been in my own nature : if this is true, as true I fear, I had almost said hope, it is, I look upon it rather as a praise, than censure of my performance. Aversion there is an involuntary commendation, where we are only hated, for being like the thing we ought to be like ; a sort of praise, however, which few actors besides myself could endure : had it been equal to the usual praise given to virtue, my cotemporaries would have thought themselves injured, if I had pretended to any share of it : so that, you see, it has been as much the dislike others had to them, as choice, that has thrown me sometimes into these characters. But it may be farther observed, that in the characters I have named, where there is so much close meditated mischief, deceit, pride, insolence, or cruelty, they cannot have the least

cast, or proffer of the amiable in them ; consequently, there can be no great demand for that harmonious sound, or pleasing round melody of voice, which in the softer sentiments of love, the wailings of distressful virtue, or in the throes and swellings of honour and ambition, may be needful to recommend them to our pity, or admiration : so that, again, my want of that requisite voice might less disqualify me for the vicious, than the virtuous character. This, too, may have been a more favourable reason for my having been chosen for them. A yet farther consideration that inclined me to them, was, that they are generally better written, thicker sown with sensible reflections, and come by so much nearer to common life and nature, than characters of admiration ; as vice is more the practice of mankind than virtue : nor could I, sometimes, help smiling at those dainty actors that were too squeamish to swallow them, as if they were one jot the better men for acting a good man well, or another man the worse, for doing equal justice to a bad one. It is not, surely, what we act, but how we act what is allotted us, that speaks our intrinsic value ; as in real life, the wise man or the fool, be he prince or peasant, will, in either state, be equally the fool, or the wise man. But, alas ! in personated life, this is no rule to the vulgar ; they are apt to think all before them real, and rate the actor according to his borrowed vice or virtue.

If, then, I had always too careless a concern for false or vulgar applause, I ought not to complain if I have had less of it than others of my time, or not less of it than I desired : yet I will venture to say, that from the common, weak appetite of false applause, many actors have run into more errors and absurdities, than their greatest ignorance could otherwise have committed : if this charge is true, it will lie chiefly upon the better judgment of the spectator to reform it.

But not to make too great a merit of my avoiding this common road to applause, perhaps I was vain enough to think I had more ways than one to come at it. That, in the variety of characters I acted, the chances to win it were the stronger on my side; that, if the multitude were not in a roar to see me in *Cardinal Wolsey*, I could be sure of them in *Alderman Fondlewife*. If they hated me in *Iago*, in *Sir Fopling* they took me for a fine gentleman; if they were silent at *Syphax*, no Italian eunuch was more applauded than when I sung in *Sir Courtly*. If the morals of *Æsop* were too grave for them, *Justice Shallow*\* was as simple, and as merry an old rake, as the wisest of our young ones could wish me. And though the terror and detestation raised by *King Richard*, might be too severe a delight

\* Mr. Davies has furnished the following account of Cibber's excellence in this character, which, for its spirit and fidelity, appears to deserve the honour of transcription :

Whether he was a copy or an original in *Shallow*, it is certain no audience was ever more fixed in deep attention, at his first appearance, or more shaken with laughter in the progress of the scenes, than at Colley Cibber's exhibition of this ridiculous justice of the peace. Some years after he had left the stage, he acted *Shallow* for his son's benefit. I believe in 1737, when Quin was the *Falstaff*, and Milward the *King*. Whether it was owing to the pleasure the spectators felt on seeing their old friend return to them again, though for that night only, after an absence of some years, I know not; but, surely, no actor or audience were ever better pleased with each other: his manner was so perfectly simple, his look so vacant, when he questioned his cousin *Silence* about the price of ewes, and lamented, in the same breath, with silly surprise, the death of old Double, that it will be impossible for any surviving spectator not to smile at the remembrance of it. The want of ideas occasions *Shallow* to repeat almost every thing he says. Cibber's transition from asking the price of bullocks, to trite, but grave reflections on mortality, was so natural, and attended with such an unmeaning roll of his small pig's eyes, accompanied with such an important utterance of "tick! tick! tick!" not much louder than the balance of a watch's pendulum, that I question if any actor was ever superior in the conception or expression of such solemn insignificancy.—"Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. 3, p. 306.

for them, yet the more gentle and modern vanities of a *Poet Bays*, or the well-bred vices of a *Lord Foppington*, were not at all more than their merry hearts, or nicer morals could bear.

These few instances, out of fifty more I could give you, may serve to explain what sort of merit I at most pretended to ; which was, that I supplied, with variety, whatever I might want of that particular skill, wherein others went before me. How this variety was executed, for by that only is its value to be rated, you who have so often been my spectator, are the proper judge : if you pronounce my performance to have been defective, I am condemned by my own evidence ; if you acquit me, these outlines may serve for a sketch of my theatrical character.

## CHAP. VII.

*The state of the stage, continued.—The occasion of Wilks's commencing actor.—His success.—Facts relating to his theatrical talent.—Actors more or less esteemed for their private characters.*

THE Lincoln's Inn Fields company were now, in 1696,\* a commonwealth, like that of Holland, divided from the tyranny of Spain : but the similitude goes very little farther. Short was the duration of their theatrical power, for though success poured in so fast upon them, at their first opening, that every thing seemed to support itself ; yet experience, in a year or two, showed them that they had never been worse governed, than when they governed themselves. Many of them began to make their particular interest more their point, than that of the general : and though some deference might be had to the measures and advice of Betterton, several of them wanted to govern in their turn ; and were often out of humour, that their opinion was not equally regarded. But have we not seen the same infirmity in senates ? The tragedians seemed to think their rank as much above the comedians, as in the characters they severally acted ; when the first were in their finery, the latter were impatient at the expense ; and looked upon it as rather laid out upon the real, than the fictitious person of the actor ; nay, I have known in our own company, this ridiculous sort of regret carried so far, that the tragedian has

\* Mr. Cibber erroneously writes, 1693.

thought himself injured, when the comedian pretended to wear a fine coat. I remember Powel, upon surveying my first dress in the “*Relapse*,” was out of all temper, and reproached our master in very rude terms, that he had not so good a suit to play *Cæsar Borgia* in, though he knew, at the same time, my *Lord Foppington* filled the house, when his bouncing *Borgia* would do little more, than pay fiddles and candles to it: and though a character of vanity might be supposed more expensive in dress, than possibly one of ambition, yet the high heart of this heretical actor could not bear that a comedian should ever pretend to be as well dressed as himself. Thus again, on the contrary, when Betterton proposed to set off a tragedy, the comedians were sure to murmur at the charge of it: and the late reputation which Dogget had acquired, from acting his *Ben*, in “*Love for Love*,” made him a more declared malcontent on such occasions; he overvalued comedy for its being nearer to nature than tragedy, which is allowed to say many fine things, that nature never spoke, in the same words; and supposing his opinion were just, yet he should have considered, that the public had a taste as well as himself; which, in policy, he ought to have complied with. Dogget, however, could not, with patience, look upon the costly trains and plumes of tragedy, in which, knowing himself to be useless, he thought they were all a vain extravagance: and when he found his singularity could no longer oppose that expense, he so obstinately adhered to his own opinion, that he left the society of his old friends, and came over to us at the theatre royal: and yet this actor always set up for a theatrical patriot. This happened in the winter following the first division of the (only) company. He came time enough to the theatre royal, to act the part of *Lory*, in the “*Relapse*,” an arch valet, quite after the French cast, pert and familiar. But

it suited so ill with Dogget's dry, and closely-natural manner of acting, that, upon the second day, he desired it might be disposed of to another ; which the author complying with, gave it to Pinkethman ; who though, in other lights, much his inferior, yet this part he seemed better to become. Dogget was so immovable in his opinion of whatever he thought was right or wrong, that he could never be easy, under any kind of theatrical government ; and was generally so warm in pursuit of his interest, that he often outran it. I remember him three times, for some years, unemployed in any theatre, from his not being able to bear, in common with others, the disagreeable accidents, that in such societities are unavoidable. But, whatever pretences he had formed for this first deserting from Lincoln's Inn Fields, I always thought his best reason for it was, that he looked upon it as a sinking ship; not only from the melancholy abatement of their profits, but, likewise, from the neglect and disorder in their government. He plainly saw that their extraordinary success at first, had made them too confident of its duration, and from thence had slackened their industry ; by which he observed, at the same time, the old house, where there was scarcely any other merit than industry, began to flourish. And, indeed, they seemed not enough to consider, that the appetite of the public, like that of a fine gentleman, could only be kept warm by variety ; that let their merit be never so high, yet the taste of a town was not always constant, nor infallible : that it was dangerous to hold their rivals in too much contempt ; for they found, that a young industrious company were soon a match for the best actors, when too securely negligent ; and negligent they certainly were, and fondly fancied that had each of their different schemes been followed, their audiences would not so suddenly have fallen off.

But, alas ! the vanity of applauded actors, when they are

not crowded to, as they may have been, makes them naturally impute the change to any cause, rather than the true one, satiety: they are mighty loth to think a town, once so fond of them, could ever be tired; and yet, at one time or other, more or less, thin houses have been the certain fate of the most prosperous actors, ever since I remember the stage. But against this evil the provident patentees had found out a relief, which the new house were not yet masters of; *viz.* never to pay their people, when the money did not come in; nor then, neither, but in such proportions as suited their conveniency. I myself was one of the many who, for six acting weeks together, never received one day's pay; and, for some years after, seldom had above half our nominal salaries: but, to the best of my memory, the finances of the other house held it not above one season more, before they were reduced to the same expedient of making the like scanty payments.

Such was the distress and fortune of both these companies, since their division from the theatre royal; either working at half wages, or, by alternate successes, intercepting the bread from one another's mouths; irreconcilable enemies, yet without hope of relief from a victory on either side; sometimes both parties reduced, and yet each supporting their spirits, by seeing the other under the same calamity.

During this state of the stage it was that the lowest expedient was made use of, to ingratiate our company in the public favour. Our master,\* who had some time practised the law, and therefore loved a storm, better than fair weather, (for it was his own conduct, chiefly, that had brought the patent into these dangers) took nothing so

\* Christopher Rich, whose history is so well detailed by our author, that he leaves me no opportunity of enlarging it.



much to heart, as that partiality wherewith, he imagined, the people of quality had preferred the actors of the other house to those of his own. To balance this misfortune, he was resolved, at least, to be well with their domestics, and therefore cunningly opened the upper gallery to them *gratis* : for before this time no footman was ever admitted, or had presumed to come into it, till after the fourth act was ended : this additional privilege (the greatest plague that ever playhouse had to complain of) he conceived, would not only incline them to give us a good word in the respective families they belonged to, but would naturally incite them, to come all hands aloft, in the crack of our applauses : and, indeed, it so far succeeded, that it often thundered from the full gallery above, while our thin pit and boxes below, were in the utmost serenity. This riotous privilege, so craftily given, and which, from custom, was at last ripened into right, became the most disgraceful nuisance that ever depreciated the theatre. How often have the most polite audiences, in the most affecting scenes of the best plays, been disturbed and insulted by the noise and clamour of these savage spectators ! From the same narrow way of thinking, too, were so many ordinary people, and unlicked cubs of condition, admitted behind our scenes, for money, and sometimes without it : the plagues and inconveniencies of which custom, we found so intolerable, when we afterwards had the stage in our hands, that, at the hazard of our lives, we were forced to get rid of them ; and our only expedient was, by refusing money from all persons, without distinction, at the stage-door. By this means we preserved to ourselves the right and liberty of chusing our own company there, and by a strict observance of this order, we brought what had been before debased into all the licenses of a lobby, into the decencies of a drawing-room.

About the distressful time I was speaking of, in the year 1696, Wilks,\* who now had been five years in great esteem

\* The ancestors of this great comedian were seated at Bromsgrove, in Worcestershire, where Judge Wilks, his grandfather, raised a troop of horse, at his own expense, for the service of Charles the First. In the cause of this misguided monarch, the family suffered so much, that the father of our hero, with his wife, and the scanty remains of an ample fortune, removed to Dublin, near which, at a place called Rathfarnham, Robert Wilks was born in the year 1670.

Having received a liberal education, his father procured him a genteel place under government, but from this situation he was attracted at a very early age, to try his fortune in the theatre. Being intimate with an actor named Richards, (1) he frequently read a speech from the parts this person was studying, and Richards complimented him so often upon his success in such efforts, that the mind of Wilks began to imbibe a passion for the drama. With a little persuasion, he ventured to act, privately, the *Colonel*, in Dryden's "Spanish Friar," and acquitted himself in this character with so much *eclat*, that he resolved upon a public trial of the talent he was warmly assured of possessing. His first public appearance was made as *Othello*, about January, 1689, and he continued for the two subsequent years upon the Dublin boards, till his friend Richards advised him to try the London theatre, where, as Betterton, his old associate, was in power, he could procure him an introduction. Furnished with letters from this veteran, Wilks embarked for England, was admitted into the

(1) This gentleman was one of the actors taken in by Sir William D'Avenant, about the year 1662, to complete the company he inherited from Rhodes. One of his earliest parts was the *Ghost*, in "Hamlet," and perhaps, it was his most important, as we afterwards find him set down in the "*Roscus Anglicanus*" for *Friar Lawrence*, in "Romco and Juliet." He is said by Chetwood, upon the information of old Ashbury, to have been a good actor both in tragedy and comedy, but not fortunate in his personal appearance.

on the Dublin theatre, returned to Drury-lane ; in which last he had first set out, and had continued to act some

Drury-lane company, and received a salary of fifteen shillings per week. Here his business, as Cibber relates, was insignificant, *Lysippus*, in the "Maid's Tragedy," being not only the first, but the best part he assumed. It is to be remembered, however, that the youth and figure of Wilks qualified him particularly for this personation, and that in characters of consequence, Mountfort, the most popular comedian of his time, had just been established. In this play, Mr. Betterton, who performed *Melantius*, had to address Wilks, in extenuation of the *King's* death, and such was the dignity with which Betterton delivered himself, that Wilks, as he acknowledged to Chetwood, could hardly muster up courage enough to make the proper replies. Betterton, who had observed his embarrassment, took occasion to encourage him, in the following words: "Young man, this fear does not ill become you. A horse that sets out at the strength of his speed will soon be jaded."

Wilks remained in London but one winter, during which he married a lady of most respectable connections, and with whom, on a refusal from the manager to raise his salary, he departed for Dublin. There it was raised to £60 per season, and a clear benefit; much higher terms than had previously been given to any other actor. He took a respectful leave of Betterton, who expressed some concern at parting with him, and said, in presence of Rich himself, that he thought the manager would be among the first to lament his loss; for, if he augured rightly, his assistance would very soon be wanted.

The success of Mr. Wilks, upon his return to Ireland, was extremely brilliant; and, it is said by Chetwood, that upon the death of Mountfort, which happened very soon after he had left the London theatre, an offer of four pounds a-week was made him by the manager, to go back and sustain the characters which Mountfort had filled. Chetwood even couples this assertion with a romantic account of

small parts for one winter only. The considerable figure which he so lately made upon the stage in London, makes me imagine that a particular account of his first commencing actor may not be unacceptable to the curious ; I shall, therefore, give it them as I had it from his own mouth.

In King James's reign he had been some time employed in the secretary's office in Ireland, (his native country) and remained in it, till after the battle of the Boyne, which completed the Revolution. Upon that happy and unexpected deliverance, the people of Dublin, among the various expressions of their joy, had a mind to have a play ; but the actors being dispersed during the war, some private persons agreed, in the best manner they were able, to give one to the public, *gratis*, at the theatre. The play was "Othello," in which Wilks acted the Moor ; and the applause he received in it warmed him to so strong an inclination for the stage, that he immediately preferred it to all his other views in life : for he quitted his post, and with the first fair occasion came over, to try his fortune, in the (then only) company of actors in London. The person who supplied his post in Dublin, he told me, raised to himself, from thence, a fortune of fifty thousand pounds. Here you have a much stronger instance of an extravagant passion for the stage, than that which I have elsewhere shown in myself ; I only quitted my *hopes* of being preferred to the like post, for it ; but Wilks quitted his actual *possession*, for the imaginary happiness which the life of an actor presented to him. And though, possibly, we might both have bettered our fortunes, in a more honourable station, yet whether better fortunes, might have equally gratified our vanity

his flight from Dublin, to accept the offer, but Cibber is certainly correct in the date he has assigned to his re-appearance.

(the universal passion of mankind) may admit of a question.

Upon his being formerly received into the theatre royal (which was in the winter after I had been initiated) his station there was much upon the same class with my own; our parts were generally of an equal insignificancy; not of consequence enough to give either a preference: but Wilks being more impatient of his low condition than I was, (and, indeed, the company was then so well stocked with good actors, that there was very little hope of getting forward,) laid hold of a more expeditious way for his advancement, and returned again to Dublin, with Mr. Ashbury, the patentee of that theatre, to act in his new company there: there went with him, at the same time Mrs. Butler, whose character I have already given, and Estcourt, who had not appeared on any stage, and was yet only known as an excellent mimic. Wilks, having no competitor in Dublin, was immediately preferred to whatever parts his inclination led him, and his early reputation on that stage, as soon raised in him an ambition to show himself on a better. And I have heard him say, in raillery of the vanity which young actors are liable to, that when the news of Mountfort's death came to Ireland, he from that time thought his fortune was made, and took a resolution to return a second time to England, with the first opportunity; but as his engagements to the stage where he was were too strong to be suddenly broke from, he returned not to the theatre royal till the year 1696.

Upon his first arrival, Powel, who was now in possession of all the chief parts of Mountfort, and the only actor that stood in Wilks's way, in seeming civility, offered him his choice of whatever he thought fit to make his first appearance in; though, in reality, the favour was intended to hurt him. But Wilks rightly judged it more modest to

accept only a part of Powel's, and which Mountfort had never acted, that of *Palamede*, in Dryden's "Marriage Alamode." Here, too, he had the advantage of having the ball played into his hands by the inimitable Mrs. Mountfort, who was then his *Melanthe* in the same play. Whatever fame Wilks had brought with him from Ireland, he as yet appeared but a very raw actor, to what he was afterwards allowed to be: his faults, however, I shall rather leave to the judgments of those who then may remember him, than to take upon me the disagreeable office of being particular upon them, farther than by saying, that in this part of *Palamede*, he was short of Powel, and missed a good deal of the loose humour of the character, which the other more happily hit. But, however, he was young, erect, of a pleasing aspect, and, in the whole, gave the town, and the stage, sufficient hopes of him. I ought to make some allowances, too, for the restraint he must naturally have been under, from his first appearance upon a new stage. But from that he soon recovered, and grew daily more in favour, not only of the town, but likewise of the patentee, whom Powel, before Wilks's arrival, had treated in almost what manner he pleased.

Upon this visible success of Wilks, the pretended contempt which Powel had held him in, began to sour into an open jealousy; he now plainly saw he was a formidable rival, and, which more hurt him, saw, too, that other people saw it; and therefore found it high time to oppose, and be troublesome to him. But Wilks happening to be as jealous of his fame as the other, you may imagine such clashing candidates could not be long without a rupture. In short, a challenge, I very well remember, came from Powel, when he was hot-headed; but, the next morning, he was cool enough to let it end in favour of Wilks. Yet however the magnanimity, on either part, might subside, the

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animosity was as deep in the heart as ever, though it was not afterwards so openly avowed : for when Powel found that intimidating would not carry his point, but that Wilks, when provoked, would really give battle, he (Powel) grew so out of humour, that he cocked his hat, and in his passion walked off to the service of the company in Lincoln's Inn Fields. But there, finding more competitors, and that he made a worse figure among them, than in the company he came from, he staid but one winter with them, before he returned to his old quarters, in Drury-lane ; where, after these unsuccessful pushes of his ambition, he at last became a martyr to negligence, and quietly submitted to the advantages and superiority which, during his late desertion, Wilks had more easily got over him.\*

\* The father of George Powel was an actor in the king's company at the time of its junction, in 1682, with the duke's, when, accompanying a few others of the old stock, he followed Mohun in his fruitless opposition to the cruel monopoly that had just been concluded. Powel's access to the theatre was, therefore, easy ; and we are intitled to suspect, though the time is not to be ascertained, that he began to act at a very early period.

We can apply to no source but the pages of Cibber, for a record of those qualifications by which Powel was distinguished, the merit he displayed, or the estimation that attended him. Cibber's enthusiasm for Betterton clouded his best faculties, and many brilliant gems have been sullied, that this precious diamond might exclusively sparkle.

Some are reproached that others may be blamed (1).

There cannot be a justifiable suspicion that the great and generous Betterton was less than Cibber has depicted him, but we have indisputable testimony that several of his contemporaries were more than he has recorded. His stiff, reluctant praise of Wilks has been

(1) Earl of Stirling's tragedy of " Cræsus."

However trifling these theatrical anecdotes may seem, to a sensible reader, yet as the different conduct of these rival

immeasurably heightened, and to this estimable actor he admits that Powel, in the best natural requisites, was proudly superior. Powel was an actor whom Rich, his employer, preferred to any he had ever seen; and in the advertisement to plays attached to the first edition of the "Spectator," published in 1711 and 1712, his name, under the management of Dogget, Cibber, and Wilks, was placed to many important characters (2). Even, according to Cibber's allowance, when Powel was appointed to the principal parts abandoned by Betterton and his revolvers, they were parts for which, whether serious or comic, he had both elocution and humour. It is remarked by Davies, (3) that Cibber "seems to have hated Powel," and if so, we have a ready clue to the neglect and asperity with which he has treated him.

Powel succeeded Betterton, it is supposed, in the part of *Hotspur*, when that excellent comedian exchanged its choleric attributes, in his declining years, for the gaiety and humour of *Falstaff*. *Edgar*, in "King Lear," was also one of his most successful characters, but of this, owing to his irregularities, he was dispossessed by Wilks. To such a height, indeed, was the intemperance of this actor carried, that Sir John Vanbrugh, in his preface to the "Relapse," 4to, 1697, speaking of Powel's *Worthy*, has exposed it in the following manner:

One word more about the bawdy, and I have done. I own the first night this thing was acted, some indecencies had like to have happened; but it was not my fault. The fine gentleman of the play, drinking his mistress's health in Nantes brandy, from six in the morning to the time he waddled on upon the stage in the evening, had toasted himself up to such a pitch of vigour, I confess I once gave up *Amanda* for gone, and am since, with all due respect to Mrs. Rogers, very sorry she escaped: a certain lady, (let no one take it to herself that is handsome) who highly blames the play, for the barrenness of the conclusion, would then have allowed it a very natural close.

(2) *Lear, Leon, Falstaff, &c.*

(3) "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 2, p. 322.



actors may be of use to others of the same profession, and from thence may contribute to the pleasure of the public ;

To the folly of intoxication he added the horrors of debt, and was so hunted by the Sheriffs' officers, that he usually walked the streets with a sword (sheathed) in his hand, and if he saw any of them at a distance, he would roar out, " Get on the other side of the way, you dog ! " The bailiff, who knew his old customer, would obligingly answer, " We do not want you *now*, Master Powel." Harassed by his distresses, and unnerved by drink, it is hardly to be wondered at if his reputation decreased, and his ability slackened ; but that his efforts were still marked by a possession of the very highest qualities that criticism can attest, is proved by the following extract from the " Spectator :—"

Having spoken of Mr. Powel as sometimes raising himself applause from the ill taste of an audience, I must do him the justice to own, that he is excellently formed for a tragedian, and, when he pleases, deserves the admiration of the best judges.—No. 40.

Addison and Steele continued their regard for this unhappy man as long as they could render him any service, and that he acted *Portius*, in " Cato," on its appearance in 1713, must have been with the author's approbation. The last trace we have of Powel is confined to a playbill, for his benefit, in the year 1717, since when no vestige has been found of his career. He lies buried, it has been said, in the vault of St. Clement-Danes ; but though the period of his death may be fixed not far from the date of this document, it cannot be minutely ascertained.

In the intervals of excess Powel found time for repeated literary labour, having written four plays, and superintended the publication of three more. His fault was too great a passion for social pleasure, but though the irregularities this passion produced, disabled him from exerting the talents he was allowed to possess, still his excellence on the stage is not to be disputed. He was esteemed at one period of his life a rival to Betterton, and had the prudence of his conduct been equal to the vigour of his genius,

let that be my excuse for pursuing them. I must, therefore, let it be known, that though in voice and ear, nature had been more kind to Powel, yet he so often lost the value of them, by an unheedful confidence, that the constant wakeful care and decency of Wilks, left the other far behind in the public esteem and approbation. Nor was his memory less tenacious than that of Wilks; but Powel put too much trust in it, and idly deferred the studying of his parts, as school-boys do their exercise, to the last day; which commonly brings them out proportionably defective. But Wilks never lost an hour of precious time, and was, in all his parts, perfect to such an exactitude, that I question, if in forty years he ever five times changed or misplaced an article, in any one of them. To be master of this uncommon diligence, is adding to the gift of nature, all that is in an actor's power; and this duty of studying perfect, whatever actor is remiss in, he will proportionably find, that nature may have been kind to him in vain: for though Powel had an assurance that covered this neglect, much better than a man of more modesty might have done, yet, with all his intrepidity, very often the diffidence, and concern for what he was to *say*, made him lose the look of what he was to *be*. While, therefore, Powel presided, his idle example made this fault so common to others, that I cannot but confess, in the general infection, I had my share of it; nor was my too critical excuse for it a good one, *viz.* that scarce one part in five, that fell to my lot, was worth the labour. But to

he would have held, as well as reached, that lofty station for which nature had designed him.

If the testimony of Aston can be relied on, Powel was born in the year 1658, being incidentally mentioned by that facetious writer, in a pamphlet already quoted, as Betterton's junior by three and twenty years.

show respect to an audience is worth the best actor's labour, and his business considered, he must be a very impudent one, that comes before them with a conscious negligence of what he is about. But Wilks was never known to make any of these venial distinctions, nor, however barren his part might be, could bear even the self-reproach of favouring his memory; and I have been astonished to see him swallow a volume of froth and insipidity, in a new play, that we were sure could not live above three days, though favoured and recommended to the stage, by some good person of quality. Upon such occasions, in compassion to his fruitless toil and labour, I have sometimes cried out with *Cato*, "Painful pre-eminence!" So insupportable, in my sense, was the task, when the bare praise of not having been negligent was sure to be the only reward of it. But so indefatigable was the diligence of Wilks, that he seemed to love it, as a good man does virtue, for its own sake; of which the following instance will give you an extraordinary proof.

In some new comedy, he happened to complain of a crabbed speech in his part, which, he said, gave him more trouble to study than all the rest of it had done; upon which he applied to the author, either to soften or shorten it. The author, that he might make the matter quite easy to him, fairly cut it all out. But, when he got home, from the rehearsal, Wilks thought it such an indignity to his memory that anything should be thought too hard for it, that he actually made himself perfect in that speech, though he knew it was never to be made use of. From this singular act of supererogation, you may judge how indefatigable the labour of his memory must have been, when his profit and honour were more concerned to make use of it.

But besides this indispensable quality of diligence, Wilks had the advantage of a sober character in private life, which

Powel not having the least regard to, laboured under the unhappy disfavour, not to say contempt, of the public, to whom his licentious courses were no secret. Even when he did well, that natural prejudice pursued him : neither the hero, nor the gentleman ; the *young Ammon*,\* nor the *Dorimant*,† could conceal, from the conscious spectator, the true George Powel. And this sort of disesteem, or favour, every actor will feel, and more or less, have his share of, as he *has* or *has not* a due regard to his private life and reputation. Nay, even false reports shall affect him, and become the cause, or pretence at least, of undervaluing, or treating him injuriously. Let me give a known instance of it, and at the same time, a justification of myself from an imputation that was laid upon me, many years before I quitted the theatre, of which you will see the consequence.

After the vast success of that new species of dramatic poetry, the “ Beggar’s Opera,” the year following, I was so stupid as to attempt something of the same kind, upon a quite different foundation, that of recommending virtue and innocence, which I ignorantly thought, might not have a less pretence to favour, than setting greatness and authority in a contemptible, and the most vulgar vice and wickedness in an amiable, light. But behold how fondly I was mistaken ! “ Love in a Riddle ” (for so my new-fangled performance was called) was as vilely damned and hooted at, as so vain a presumption, in the idle cause of virtue, could deserve. Yet this is not what I complain of: I will allow my poetry to be as much below the other, as taste or criticism can sink it ; I will grant, likewise, that the applauded author of the “ Beggar’s Opera,” (whom I knew to be an honest good-natured man, and who, when he had descended

\* “ Rival Queens.”

† “ Man of Mode.”

to write more like one, in the cause of virtue, had been as unfortunate as others of that class;) I will grant, I say, that in his "Beggar's Opera," he had more skilfully gratified the public taste, than all the brightest authors that ever wrote before him; and I have sometimes thought, from the modesty of his motto, "*Nos hæc novimus esse nihil*," that he gave them that performance as a satire upon the depravity of their judgment, (as Ben Jonson, of old, was said to give his "Bartholomew Fair," in ridicule of the vulgar taste, which had disliked his "Sejanus,") and that, by artfully seducing them to be the champions of the immoralities he himself detested, he should be amply revenged on their former severity and ignorance. This were indeed a triumph which even the author of "Cato" might have envied. "Cato," it is true, succeeded, but reached not, by full forty days, the progress and applauses of the "Beggar's Opera." Will it, however, admit of a question, which of the two compositions a good writer would rather wish to have been the author of? Yet, on the other side, must we not allow, that to have taken a whole nation, high and low, into a general applause, has shown a power in poetry, which, though often attempted in the same kind, none but this one author could ever yet arrive at? By what rule, then, are we to judge of our true national taste? But, to keep a little closer to my point.

The same author, the next year, had, according to the laws of the land, transported his hero to the West Indies, in a second part to the "Beggar's Opera;" but so it happened, to the surprise of the public, this second part was forbid to come upon the stage. Various were the speculations upon this act of power: some thought that the author, others that the town, was hardly dealt with; a third sort, who, perhaps, had envied him the success of his first part, affirmed, when it was printed, that, whatever the

intention might be, the fact was in his favour ; that he had been a greater gainer, by subscriptions to his copy, than he could have been by a bare theatrical presentation.

Whether any part of these opinions were true, I am not concerned to determine or consider ; but how they affected me, I am going to tell you. Soon after this prohibition, my performance was to come upon the stage, at a time when many people were out of humour at the late disappointment, and seemed willing to lay hold of any pretence of making a reprisal. Great umbrage was taken that I was permitted to have the whole town to myself, by this absolute forbiddance of what they had more mind to have been entertained with. And, some few days before my bauble was acted, I was informed that a strong party would be made against it : this report I slighted, as not conceiving why it should be true ; and when I was afterwards told what was the pretended provocation of this party, I slighted it still more, as having less reason to suppose any persons could believe me capable (had I had the power) of giving such a provocation. The report, it seems, that had run against me was this : that to make way for the success of my own play, I had privately found means, or made interest, that the second part of the “ Beggar’s Opera ” might be suppressed. What an involuntary compliment did the reporters of this falsehood make me, to suppose me of consideration enough to influence a great officer of state, to gratify the spleen or envy of a comedian, so far as to rob the public of an innocent diversion, (if it were such) that none but that cunning comedian might be suffered to give it them. This is so very gross a supposition, that it needs only its own senseless face to confound it ; let that alone, then, be my defence against it. But against blind malice, and staring inhumanity, whatever is upon the stage has no defence. There, they knew, I stood helpless, and

and exposed to whatever they might please to load or asperse me with. I had not considered, poor devil! that, from the security of a full pit, dunces might be critics, cowards valiant, and apprentices gentlemen. Whether any such were concerned in the murder of my play, I am not certain; for I never endeavoured to discover any one of its assassins; I cannot afford them a milder name, from their unmanly manner of destroying it. Had it been heard, they might have left me nothing to say to them: 'tis true, it faintly held up its wounded head a second day, and would have spoken for mercy, but was not suffered. Not even the presence of a royal heir apparent could protect it. But then I was reduced to be serious with them; their clamour, then, became an insolence, which I thought it my duty, by the sacrifice of any interest of my own, to put an end to. I therefore quitted the actor for the author, and, stepping forward to the pit, told them, "That since I found they were not inclined that this play should go forward, I gave them my word, that after this night, it should never be acted again: but that, in the meantime, I hoped they would consider in whose presence they were, and, for that reason at least, would suspend what farther marks of their displeasure they might imagine I had deserved." At this there was a dead silence; and, after some little pause, a few civilised hands signified their approbation. When the play went on, I observed about a dozen persons, of no extraordinary appearance, sullenly walked out of the pit; after which, every scene of it, while uninterrupted, met with more applause than my best hopes had expected. But it came too late: peace to its manes! I had given my word it should fall, and I kept it, by giving out another play for the next day, though I knew the boxes were all let for the same again. Such, then, was the treatment I met with: how much of it, the errors of the play might deserve, I refer to

the judgment of those who may have curiosity and idle time enough to read it. But if I had no occasion to complain of the reception it met with from its *quieted* audience, surely it can be no great vanity, to impute its disgraces, chiefly, to that severe resentment which a groundless report of me had inflamed. Yet those disgraces have left me something to boast of, an honour preferable even to the applause of my enemies. A noble lord came behind the scenes, and told me, from the box where he was in waiting, "That what I said to quiet the audience was extremely well taken there; and that I had been commended for it, in a very obliging manner." Now, though this was the only tumult that I have known to have been so effectually appeased, these fifty years, by anything that could be said to an audience, in the same humour, I will not take any great merit to myself upon it; because when, like me, you will but humbly submit to their doing you all the mischief they can, they will, at any time, be satisfied.

I have mentioned this particular fact, to inforce what I before observed, that the private character of an actor will always, more or less, affect his public performance. And if I suffered so much, from the bare suspicion of my having been guilty of a base action, what should not an actor expect, that is hardy enough to think his whole private character of no consequence? I could offer many more, though less severe, instances of the same nature. I have seen the most tender sentiment of love, in tragedy, create laughter, instead of compassion, when it has been applicable to the real engagements of the person that uttered it. I have known good parts thrown up, from an humble consciousness that something in them might put an audience in mind of what was rather wished might be forgotten: those remarkable words of *Evadne*, in the "Maid's Tra-



gedy"—“ A maidenhead, Amintor, at my years ?”—have sometimes been a much stronger jest, for being a true one. But these are reproaches, which, in all nations, the theatre must have been used to, unless we could suppose actors something more than human creatures, void of faults or frailties. It is a misfortune, at least, not limited to the English stage. I have seen the better-bred audience, in Paris, made merry even with a modest expression, when it has come from the mouth of an actress, whose private character it seemed not to belong to. The apprehension of these kind of fleers, from the wittings of a pit, has been carried so far in our own country, that a late valuable actress\* (who was conscious her beauty was not her greatest merit) desired the warmth of some lines might be abated, when they have made her too remarkably handsome : but in this discretion she was alone ; few others were afraid of undeserving the finest things that could be said to them. But to consider this matter seriously, I cannot but think, at a play, a sensible auditor would contribute all he could to his being well deceived, and not suffer his imagination so far to wander from the well-acted character before him, as to gratify a frivolous spleen, by mocks or personal sneers, on the performer, at the expense of his better entertainment. But I must now take up Wilks and Powel again, where I left them.

Though the contention for superiority between them seemed about this time to end in favour of the former, yet the distress of the patentee (in having his servant his master, as Powel had lately been,) was not much relieved by the victory ; he had only changed the man, but not the malady : for Wilks, by being in possession of so many good parts, fell into the common error of most actors,

\* Most probably Mrs. Oldfield.

that of overrating their merit, or never thinking it is so thoroughly considered as it ought to be ; which generally makes them proportionably troublesome to the master, who, they might consider, only pays them, to profit by them. The patentee, therefore, found it as difficult to satisfy the continual demands of Wilks, as it was dangerous to refuse them ; very few were made that were not granted, and as few were granted as were not grudged him : not but our good master was as sly a tyrant as ever was at the head of a theatre ; for he gave the actors more liberty and fewer days' pay than any of his predecessors : he would laugh with them over a bottle, and bite them in their bargains : he kept them poor, that they might not be able to rebel ; and sometimes merry, that they might not think of it : all their articles of agreement had a clause in them that he was sure to creep out at, *viz.* their respective salaries were to be paid in such manner and proportion as others of the same company were paid ; which, in effect, made them all, when he pleased, but limited sharers of loss, and himself sole proprietor of profits ; and this loss or profit they only had such verbal accounts of, as he thought proper to give them. It is true, he would sometimes advance them money, (but not more than he knew, at most, could be due to them) upon their bonds ; upon which, whenever they were mutinous, he would threaten to sue them. This was the net we danced in for several years : but no wonder we were dupes, while our master was a lawyer. This grievance, however, Wilks was resolved, for himself at least, to remedy at any rate ; and grew daily more intractable, for every day his redress was delayed. Here our master found himself under a difficulty he knew not well how to get out of : for as he was a close subtle man, he seldom made use of a confidant in his schemes of government : but here the old expedient of delay would stand

him in no longer stead ; Wilks must instantly be complied with, or Powel come again into power. In a word, he was pushed so home, that he was reduced even to take my opinion into his assistance, for he knew I was a rival to neither of them ; perhaps, too, he had fancied that, from the success of my first play, I might know as much of the stage, and what made an actor valuable, as either of them : he saw, too, that though they had each of them five good parts to my one, yet the applause which in my few I had met with, was given me by better judges than, as yet, had approved of the best they had done. They generally measured the goodness of a part by the quantity or length of it : I thought none bad for being short, that were closely natural ; nor any the better for being long, without that valuable quality. But, in this, I doubt, as to their interest, they judged better than myself ; for I have generally observed that those who do a great deal not ill, have been preferred to those who do but little, though never so masterly. And therefore I allow, that while there were so few good parts, and as few good judges of them, it ought to have been no wonder to me that, as an actor, I was less valued by the master or the common people than either of them : all the advantage I had of them was, that by not being troublesome, I had more of our master's personal inclination than any actor of the male sex ; and so much of it, that I was almost the only one whom, at that time, he used to take into his parties of pleasure ; very often *tête à tête*, and sometimes in a *partie quarrée*. These, then, were the qualifications, however good or bad, to which may be imputed our master's having made choice of me, to assist him in the difficulty under which he now laboured. He was himself sometimes inclined to set up Powel again as a check upon the overbearing temper of Wilks : though, to say truth, he liked neither of them ; but was still under a necessity that one of them should preside ;

though he scarce knew which of the two evils to chuse. This question, when I happened to be alone with him, was often debated in our evening conversation ; nor, indeed, did I find it an easy matter to know which party I ought to recommend to his election. I knew they were neither of them well-wishers to me, as in common they were enemies to most actors, in proportion to the merit that seemed to be rising in them. But as I had the prosperity of the stage more at heart than any other consideration, I could not be long undetermined in my opinion, and therefore gave it to our master, at once, in favour of Wilks. I, with all the force I could muster, insisted, that if Powel were preferred, the ill example of his negligence and abandoned character (whatever his merit on the stage might be) would reduce our company to contempt and beggary ; observing, at the same time, in how much better order our affairs went forward, since Wilks came among us, of which I recounted several instances, that are not so necessary to tire my reader with. All this though he allowed to be true, yet Powel, he said, was a better actor than Wilks, when he minded his business ; that is to say, when he was, what he seldom was, sober. But Powel, it seems, had a still greater merit to him, which was, (as he observed) that when affairs were in his hands, he had kept the actors quiet, without one day's pay, for six weeks together, and it was not every body could do that ; “ for you see,” said he, “ Wilks will never be easy, unless I give him his whole pay when others have it not, and what an injustice would that be to the rest, if I were to comply with him ! How do I know, but then they may be all in a mutiny, and mayhap (that was his expression) with Powel at the head of them ?” By this specimen of our debate, it may be judged under how particular and merry a government the theatre then laboured. To conclude, this matter ended in a resolution to sign a new agreement with

Wilks, which entitled him to his full pay of four pounds a week, without any conditional deductions. How far soever my advice might have contributed to our master's settling his affairs upon this foot, I never durst make the least merit of it to Wilks, well knowing that his great heart would have taken it as a mortal affront, had I, though never so distantly, hinted that his demands had needed any assistance but the justice of them. From this time, then, Wilks became first minister, or bustle-master general of the company. He now seemed to take new delight in keeping the actors close to their business; and got every play revived with care, in which he had acted the chief part in Dublin: 'tis true, this might be done with a particular view of setting off himself to advantage, but if, at the same time, it served the company, he ought not to want our commendation: now, though my own conduct neither had the appearance of his merit, nor the reward that followed his industry, I cannot help observing, that it showed me, to the best of my power, a more cordial commonwealth's man. His first views, in serving himself, made his service to the whole but an incidental merit: whereas, by my prosecuting the means to make him easy in his pay, unknown to him, or without asking any favour for myself, at the same time, I gave a more unquestionable proof of my preferring the public to my private interest: from the same principle I never murmured at whatever little parts fell to my share, and though I knew it would not recommend me to the favour of the common people, I often submitted to play wicked characters, rather than they should be worse done by weaker actors than myself. But, perhaps, in all this patience under my situation, I supported my spirits by a conscious vanity; for I fancied I had more reason to value myself upon being sometimes the confident and companion of our master, than Wilks had in all the more public fa-

vours he had extorted from him. I imagined, too, there was sometimes as much skill to be shown in a short part, as in the most voluminous which he generally made choice of; that even the coxcomby follies of a *Sir John Daw*, might as well distinguish the capacity of an actor, as all the dry enterprises and busy conduct of a *Truewit*. Nor could I have any reason to repine at the superiority he enjoyed, when I considered at how dear a rate it was purchased, at the continual expense of a restless jealousy, and fretful impatience. These were the passions that, in the height of his successes, kept him lean to his last hour, while what I wanted in rank or glory was amply made up to me in ease and cheerfulness. But let not this observation either lessen his merit, or lift up my own; since our different tempers were not in our choice, but equally natural to both of us. To be employed on the stage was the delight of his life; to be justly excused from it was the joy of mine: I loved ease, and he pre-eminence: in that he might be more commendable. Though he often disturbed me, he seldom could do it without more disordering himself: in our disputes his warmth could less bear truth than I could support manifest injuries: he would hazard our undoing to gratify his passions, though otherwise an honest man; and I rather chose to give up my reason, or not see my wrong, than ruin our community by an equal rashness. By this opposite conduct, our accounts at the end of our labours stood thus: while he lived, he was the elder man, when he died, he was not so old as I am: he never left the stage till he left the world: I never so well enjoyed the world, as when I left the stage: he died in possession of his wishes; and I by having had a less cholerick ambition, am still tasting mine in health and liberty. But as he, in a great measure, wore out the organs of life, in his incessant labours to gratify the

public, the many whom he gave pleasure to will always owe his memory a favourable report. Some facts, that will vouch for the truth of this account, will be found in the sequel of these memoirs. If I have spoken with more freedom of his quondam competitor Powel, let my good intentions to future actors, in showing what will so much concern them to avoid, be my excuse for it: for though Powel had from nature much more than Wilks; in voice and ear, in elocution, in tragedy, and humour in comedy, greatly the advantage of him; yet, as I have observed, from the neglect and abuse of those valuable gifts, he suffered Wilks to be of thrice the service to our society. Let me give another instance of the reward and favour which, in a theatre, diligence and sobriety seldom fail of. Mills the elder grew into the friendship of Wilks, with not a great deal more than those useful qualities to recommend him: he was an honest, quiet, careful man, of as few faults as excellencies, and Wilks rather chose him for his second in many plays, than an actor of perhaps greater skill, that was not so laboriously diligent. And from this constant assiduity, Mills, with making to himself a friend in Wilks, was advanced to a larger salary than any man-actor had enjoyed, during my time on the stage. I have yet to offer a more happy recommendation of temperance, which a late celebrated actor was warned into, by the misconduct of Powel. About the year that Wilks returned from Dublin, Booth, who had commenced actor upon that theatre, came over to the company in Lincoln's Inn Fields: he was then but an undergraduate of the buskin, and as he told me himself, had been for some time too frank a lover of the bottle; but having had the happiness to observe into what contempt and distresses Powel had plunged himself by the same vice, he was so struck with the terror of his example, that he fixed

a resolution (which, from that time to the end of his days, he strictly observed) of utterly reforming it ; an uncommon act of philosophy in a young man, of which, in his fame and fortune, he afterwards enjoyed the reward and benefit. These observations I have not merely thrown together as a moralist, but to prove that the briskest loose liver or intemperate man, though morality were out of the question, can never arrive at the necessary excellencies of a good or useful actor.



## CHAP. VIII.

*The Patentee of Drury-lane wiser than his actors.—His particular management.—The author continues to write plays.—Why.—The best dramatic poets censured by Jeremy Collier, in his “Short View of the Stage.”—It has a good effect.—The Master of the Revels, from that time, cautious in his licensing of new plays.—A complaint against him.—His authority founded upon custom only.—The late law for fixing that authority in a proper person considered.*

THOUGH the master of our theatre had no conception himself of theatrical merit, either in authors or actors, yet his judgment was governed by a saving rule in both. He looked into his receipts for the value of a play, and from common fame he judged of his actors. But, by whatever rule he was governed, while he had prudently reserved to himself a power of not paying them more than their merit could get, he could not be much deceived by their being over or under-valued. In a word, he had, with great skill, inverted the constitution of the stage, and quite changed the channel of profits arising from it; formerly, when there was but one company, the proprietors punctually paid the actors their appointed salaries, and took to themselves only the clear profits: but our wiser proprietor took first out of every day's receipts two shillings in the pound to himself, and left their salaries to be paid only as the less or greater deficiencies of acting, according to his own accounts, would permit. What seemed most extraordinary in these measures was that, at the same time, he had per-

suaded us to be contented with our condition, upon his assuring us that, as fast as money would come in, we should all be paid our arrears : and that we might not have it always in our power to say he had never intended to keep his word, I remember, in a few years after this time, he once paid us nine days in one week : this happened when the “Funeral ; or, Grief à la Mode,” was first acted, with more than expected success. Whether this well-timed bounty was only allowed us, to save appearances, I will not say : but if that was his real motive for it, it was too costly a frolic to be repeated, and was, at least, the only grimace of its kind he vouchsafed us ; we never having received one day more of those arrears, in above fifteen years’ service.

While the actors were in this condition, I think I may very well be excused in my presuming to write plays, which I was forced to do, for the support of my increasing family, my precarious income, as an actor, being then too scanty to supply it with even the necessaries of life.

It may be observable, too, that my muse and my spouse were equally prolific ; that the one was seldom the mother of a child, but in the same year the other made me the father of a play : I think we had a dozen of each sort between us ; of both which kinds, some died in their infancy, and near an equal number of each were alive when I quitted the theatre. But it is no wonder, when a muse is only called upon by family duty, she should not always rejoice in the fruit of her labour. To this necessity of writing, then, I attribute the defects of my second play, which coming out too hastily, the year after my first, turned to very little account. But having got as much by my first as I ought to have expected from the success of them both, I had no great reason to complain : not but, I confess, so bad was my second, that I do not chuse to tell you the

name of it ; and that it might be peaceably forgotten, I have not given it a place in the two volumes of those I published in quarto, in the year 1721. And whenever I took upon me to make some dormant play of an old author, to the best of my judgment, fitter for the stage, it was, honestly not to be idle that set me to work ; as a good housewife will mend old lincn, when she has not better employment : but when I was more warmly engaged by a subject entirely new, I only thought it a good subject, when it seemed worthy of an abler pen than my own, and might prove as useful to the hearer, as profitable to myself : therefore, whatever any of my productions might want of skill, learning, wit, or humour, or however unqualified I might be to instruct others, who so ill governed myself ; yet such plays (entirely my own) were not wanting, at least, in what our most admired writers seemed to neglect, and without which, I cannot allow the most taking play to be intrinsically good, or to be a work upon which a man of sense and probity should value himself : I mean when they do not, as well *prodesse*, as *delectare*,—give profit with delight. The *utile dulci* was, of old, equally the point ; and has always been my aim, however wide of the mark, I may have shot my arrow. It has often given me amazement, that our best authors of that time could think the wit and spirit of their scenes could be an excuse for making the looseness of them public. The many instances of their talents so abused, are too glaring to need a closer comment, and are sometimes too gross to be recited. If, then, to have avoided this imputation, or rather to have had the interest and honour of virtue always in view, can give merit to a play, I am contented that my readers should think such merit the all that mine have to boast of. Libertines of mere wit and pleasure may laugh at these grave laws that would limit a lively genius, but every sen-

sible honest man, conscious of their truth and use, will give these ralliers smile for smile, and show a due contempt for their merriment.

But while our authors took these extraordinary liberties with their wit, I remember the ladies were then observed to be decently afraid of venturing bare-faced to a new comedy, till they had been assured they might do it, without the risk of an insult to their modesty : or, if their curiosity were too strong for their patience, they took care, at least, to save appearances, and rarely came upon the first days of acting but in masks, (then daily worn, and admitted in the pit, the side-boxes, and gallery) which custom, however, had so many ill consequences attending it, that it has been abolished these many years.

These immoralities of the stage had, by an avowed indulgence, been creeping into it ever since King Charles's time ; nothing that was loose could then be too low for it : the " London Cuckolds," the most rank play that ever succeeded, was then in the highest court favour. In this almost general corruption, Dryden, whose plays were more famed for their wit than their chastity, led the way, which he fairly confesses, and endeavours to excuse, in his epilogue to the " Pilgrim," revived in 1700 for his benefit, in his declining age, and fortune. The following lines of it will make good my observation.

Perhaps the Parson\* stretch'd a point too far,  
When with our theatres he wag'd a war.  
He tells you, that this very moral age  
Receiv'd the first infection from the stage,  
But sure, a banish'd court, with lewdness fraught,  
The seeds of open vice returning brought;

\* Mr. Collier.

Thus lodg'd (as vice by great example thrives)  
 It first debauch'd the daughters, and the wives :  
 London, a fruitful soil, yet never bore  
 So plentiful a crop of horns before.  
 The poets, who must live by courts or starve,  
 Were proud, so good a government to serve,  
 . And mixing with buffoons, and pimps, profane,  
 Tainted the stage, for some small snip of gain :  
 For they, like harlots under bawds profess'd,  
 Took all th'ungodly pains, and got the least.  
 Thus did the thriving malady prevail,  
 The court, its head, the poets but the tail.  
 The sin was of our native growth, 'tis true,  
 The scandal of the sin was wholly new.  
 Misses there were, but modestly conceal'd ;  
 Whitehall the naked Venus first reveal'd,  
 Where, standing as at Cyprus, in her shrine,  
 The strumpet was ador'd with rites divine, &c.

This epilogue, and the prologue to the same play, written by Dryden, I spoke myself, which not being usually done by the same person, I have a mind, while I think of it, to let you know on what occasion they both fell to my share, and how other actors were affected by it.

Sir John Vanbrugh, who had given some light touches of his pen to the "Pilgrim," to assist the benefit day of Dryden, had the disposal of the parts, and I being then, as an actor, in some favour with him, he read the play, first, with me alone, and was pleased to offer me my choice of what I might like best for myself in it. But as the chief characters were not (according to my taste) the most shining, it was no great self-denial in me, that I desired he would first take care of those who were more difficult to be pleased ; I therefore only chose, for myself, two short incidental parts, that of the *Stuttering Cook*, and the *Mail*

*Englishman*, in which homely characters I saw more matter for delight, than those that might have a better pretence to the amiable: and when the play came to be acted, I was not deceived in my choice. Sir John, upon my being contented with so little a share in the entertainment, gave me the epilogue to make up my mess; which being written so much above the strain of common authors, I confess I was not a little pleased with. And Dryden, upon his hearing me repeat it to him, made me a farther compliment of trusting me with the prologue. This so particular distinction was looked upon by the actors as something too extraordinary. But no one was so impatiently ruffled at it as Wilks, who seldom chose soft words when he spoke of any thing he did not like. The most gentle thing he said of it was, that he did not understand such treatment; that for his part he looked upon it as an affront to all the rest of the company, that there should be but one out of the whole judged fit to speak either a prologue, or an epilogue. To quiet him, I offered to decline either in his favour, or both, if it were equally easy to the author: but he was too much concerned to accept of an offer that had been made to another in preference to himself, and which he seemed to think his best way of resenting, was to condemn. But from that time, however, he was resolved, to the best of his power, never to let the first offer of a prologue escape him; which little ambition sometimes made him pay too dear for his success: the flatness of the many miserable prologues that by this means fell to his lot, seemed wofully unequal to the few good ones he might have reason to triumph in.

I have given you this fact, only as a sample of those frequent rubs and impediments I met with, when any step was made to my being distinguished as an actor; and from this incident, too, you may partly see what occasioned so many prologues, after the death of Betterton, to fall into the hands

of one speaker : but it is not every successor to a vacant post that brings into it the talents equal to those of a predecessor. To speak a good prologue well is, in my opinion, one of the hardest parts, and strongest proofs, of sound elocution, of which, I confess, I never thought that any of the several who attempted it, showed themselves, by far, equal masters to Betterton. Betterton, in the delivery of a good prologue, had a natural gravity, that gave strength to good sense ; a tempered spirit, that gave life to wit ; and a dry reserve in his smile, that threw ridicule into its brightest colours. Of these qualities, in the speaking of a prologue, Booth only had the first, but attained not to the other two : Wilks had spirit, but gave too loose a rein to it, and it was seldom he could speak a grave and weighty verse harmoniously : his accents were frequently too sharp and violent, which sometimes occasioned his eagerly cutting off half the sound of syllables, that ought to have been gently melted into the melody of metre : in verses of humour, too, he would sometimes carry the mimicry farther than the hint would bear, even to a trifling light, as if himself were pleased to see it so glittering. In the truth of this criticism, I have been confirmed by those whose judgment I dare more confidently rely on than my own. Wilks had many excellencies, but if we leave prologue-speaking out of the number, he will still have enough to have made him a valuable actor. And I only make this exception from them, to caution others from imitating what, in his time, they might have too implicitly admired. But I have a word or two more to say concerning the immoralities of the stage. Our theatrical writers were not only accused of immorality, but profaneness ; many flagrant instances of which were collected and published by a non-juring clergyman, Jeremy Collier, in his " View of the Stage," &c.,\* about the year 1697. How-

\* Steele, in the " Tattler," No. 8, recommends the stage as an

ever just his charge against the authors that then wrote for it might be, I cannot but think his sentence against the stage

easy and agreeable method of making a polite and moral gentry, which would end in rendering the rest of the people regular in their conduct, and ambitious of laudable undertakings. The business of plays, observes Collier, in strict consonance with this remark, is “to recommend virtue and discountenance vice; to show the uncertainty of human greatness, and the unhappy conclusions of violence and injustice; to expose the singularities of pride, to repress affectation, to make falsehood contemptible; and, in short, to bring infamy and neglect upon every bad thing that deserves their visitation.” This is that “apt use of a theatre,” in which all moralists must agree, and the only difference that exists in their efforts to maintain it, has sprung from the manner in which the blasphemy and indecencies of the theatre were viewed.

Indignant at the lewdness and debauchery by which the stage was disgraced, Mr. Collier proceeded, from a consideration of its design, to trace and exhibit the evils by which that design was perverted. He saw that our dramatic poets were writing from another principle, and though he owned the value of that power with which they were invested, he denounced the evils that were flowing from its utter misapplication. The advantages of show, music, action, and eloquence, to use his own forcible figure, were now in the enemy’s hands, and, like captured cannon, being pointed the wrong way, by the very strength of the defence the mischief was made the greater. To manifest the truth of his complaint, he undertook to prove the misbehaviour of the stage, with respect to morality and religion, and though his remarks upon both points were sometimes rude, intolerant, and fanatical, he certainly substantiated various gross irregularities, that the objects of his severity were unable to defend.

It has been admitted, that many authors in high esteem with the public, had written in a style which warranted the censure of every person who felt the least dislike of profaneness and immorality. The leading dramatists of the day were severely handled,



itself is unequal : reformation he thinks too mild a treatment for it, and is therefore for laying his axe to the root of it. If this were to be a rule of judgment for offences of the same nature, what might become of the pulpit, where many a seditious and corrupted teacher has been known to cover the most pernicious doctrine with the mask of religion ? This puts me in mind of what the noted Jo. Hayns, the comedian, a fellow of a wicked wit, said upon this occasion ; who being asked what could transport Mr. Collier into so blind a zeal for a general suppression of the stage, when only some particular author had abused it ; whereas the stage, he could not but know, was generally allowed, when rightly conducted, to be a delightful method of mending our morals ? “ For that reason,” replied Hayns : “ Collier is by profession a moral-mender himself, and two of a trade, you know, can never agree.”

The authors of the “ Old Bachelor,” and of the “ Relapse,” were those whom Collier most laboured to convict of immorality ; to which they severally published their reply : the first seemed too much hurt, to be able to defend and though several replies to his book were immediately made such was the soundness of his arguments, and the pleasantry of his humour, that Mr. Collier succeeded in a sudden, thorough, permanent reformation of the prevailing excesses. His chapter upon the treatment of the clergy, in which he contends for their exemption as a class, from the just raillery their vices might provoke, is a piece of bigotry that shames his powerful understanding ; and the zeal with which he advocates a total suppression of the stage, though setting out with an acknowledgment of its value, merely proves to what a pitch of absurdity and error the best minds may be carried by religious mistake. Mr. Collier’s “ View” is not to be tried, however, by its failings ; they may be many and palpable, but the good he achieved was so great and lasting, that his work deserves the very warmest admiration in which it has ever been held.

himself, and the other felt him so little, that his wit only laughed at his lashes.\*

My first play of the "Fool in Fashion," too, being then in a course of success, perhaps, for that reason only, this severe author thought himself obliged to attack it; in which, I hope, he has shown more zeal than justice. His greatest charge against it is, that it sometimes uses the word "Faith!" as an oath, in the dialogue; but if "faith" may as well signify our given word or credit, as our religious belief, why might not his charity have taken it in the less criminal sense? Nevertheless, Mr. Collier's book was, upon the whole, thought so laudable a work, that King William, soon after it was published, granted him a *nolo prosequi*, when he stood answerable to the law for his having absolved two criminals, just before they were executed for high treason. And it must be farther granted, that his calling our dramatic writers to this strict account, had a very wholesome effect upon those who wrote after this time. They were now a great deal more upon their guard; indecencies were no longer wit; and, by degrees, the fair sex came again to fill the boxes on the first day of a new comedy, without fear or censure. But the Master of the Revels, who then licensed all plays for the stage, assisted this reformation with a more zealous severity than ever. He would strike out whole scenes of a vicious or immoral character, though it were visibly shown to be reformed, or punished; a severe instance of this kind falling upon myself, may be an excuse for my relating it. When

\* "Congreve's pride was hurt by Collier's attack on plays, which all the world had admired and commended; and no hypocrite showed more rancour and resentment, when unmasked, than this author, so greatly celebrated for sweetness of temper, and elegance of manners."—"Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. 3, p. 377.

“King Richard the Third,” as I altered it from Shakespeare, came from his hands to the stage, he expunged the whole first act, without sparing a line of it. This extraordinary stroke of a *sic volo*, occasioned my applying to him for the small indulgence of a speech or two, that the other four acts might limp on, with a little less absurdity. No ! he had not leisure to consider what might be separately inoffensive. He had an objection to the whole act, and the reason he gave for it was, that the distresses of *King Henry the Sixth*, who is killed by *Richard* in the first act, would put weak people too much in mind of King James, then living in France. A notable proof of his zeal for the government ! Those who have read either the play or the history, I dare say, will think he strained hard for the parallel. In a word, we were forced, for some few years, to let the play take its fate, with only four acts divided into five ; by the loss of so considerable a limb, may not one modestly suppose it was robbed of, at least, a fifth part of that favour it afterwards met with ? For though this first act was at last recovered, and made the play whole again, yet the relief came too late to repay me for the pains I had taken in it. Nor did I ever hear that this zealous severity of the Master of the Revels was afterwards thought justifiable. But my good fortune, in process of time, gave me an opportunity to talk with my oppressor in my turn.

The patent granted by his majesty King George the First, to Sir Richard Steele and his assigns, of which I was one, made us sole judges of what plays might be proper for the stage, without submitting them to the approbation or license of any other particular person. Notwithstanding which, the Master of the Revels demanded his fee of forty shillings, upon our acting a new one, though we had spared him the trouble of perusing it. This occasioned my being deputed to him, to inquire into the right of his demand,

and to make an amicable end of our dispute. I confess I did not dislike the office ; and told him, according to my instructions, that I came not to defend even our own right, in prejudice to his ; that if our patent had inadvertently superseded the grant of any former power or warrant, whereon he might ground his pretensions, we would not insist upon our broad seal, but would readily answer his demands, upon sight of such his warrant, anything in our patent to the contrary notwithstanding. This I had reason to think he could not do ; and when I found he made no direct reply to my question, I repeated it with greater civilities, and offers of compliance, till I was forced in the end to conclude with telling him, that as his pretensions were not backed with any visible instrument of right, and as his strongest plea was custom, we could not so far extend our complaisance, as to continue his fees upon so slender a claim to them : and from that time, neither our plays nor his fees gave either of us any farther trouble. In this negotiation I am the bolder to think justice was on our side, because the law lately passed,\* by which the power of

\* The Abbé Le Blanc, (1) who was in England at the time this law passed, has the following remarks upon it in his correspondence :

“ This act occasioned an universal murmur in the nation, and was openly complained of in the public papers : in all the coffee-houses of London it was treated as an unjust law, and manifestly contrary to the liberties of the people of England. When winter came, and the play-houses were opened, that of Covent-garden began with three new pieces, which had been approved of by the Lord Chamberlain. There was a crowd of spectators present at the first, and among the number myself. The best play in the

(1) Mr. Garrick, when in Paris, refused to meet this writer, on account of the irreverence with which he had treated Shakspeare.

licensing plays, &c. is given to a proper person, is a strong presumption that no law had ever given that power to any such person before.

world would not have succeeded the first night. (1) There was a resolution to damn whatever might appear, the word *hiss* not being sufficiently expressive for the English. They always say, to *damn* a piece, to *damn* an author, &c. and, in reality, the word is not too strong to express the manner in which they receive a play which does not please them. The farce in question was damned indeed, without the least compassion: nor was that all, for the actors were driven off the stage, and happy was it for the author that he did not fall into the hands of this furious assembly.

“As you are unacquainted with the customs of this country, you cannot easily devise who were the authors of all this disturbance. Perhaps you may think they were schoolboys, apprentices, clerks, or mechanics. No, sir, they were men of a very grave and genteel profession; they were lawyers, and please you; a body of gentlemen, perhaps less honoured, but certainly more feared here than they are in France. Most of them live in colleges, (2) where, conversing always with one another, they mutually preserve a spirit of independency through the body, and with great ease form cabals. These gentlemen, in the stage entertainments of London, behave much like our footboys, in those at a fair. With us, your party-coloured gentry are the most noisy; but here, men of the law have all the sway, if I may be permitted to call so those pretended professors of it, who are rather the organs of chicanery, than the interpreters of justice. At Paris the cabals of the pit are only among young fellows, whose years may excuse

(1) The action was interrupted almost as soon as begun, in presence of a numerous assembly, by a cabal who had resolved to overthrow the first effect of this act of parliament, though it had been thought necessary for the regulation of the stage.

(2) Called here Inns of Court, as the two Temples, Lincoln's Inn, Gray's Inn, Doctor's Commons, &c.

My having mentioned this law, which so immediately affected the stage, inclines me to throw out a few observations upon it : but I must first lead you gradually through

their folly, or persons of the meanest education and stamp ; here they are the fruit of deliberations in a very grave body of people, who are not less formidable to the minister in place, than to the theatrical writers.

“ The players were not dismayed, but soon after stuck up bills for another new piece : there was the same crowding at Covent-garden, to which I again contributed. I was sure, at least, that if the piece advertised was not performed, I should have the pleasure of beholding some very extraordinary scene acted in the pit.

“ Half an hour before the play was to begin, the spectators gave notice of their dispositions by frightful hisses and outcries, equal, perhaps, to what were ever heard at a Roman amphitheatre. I could not have known, but by my eyes only, that I was among an assembly of beings who thought themselves to be reasonable. The author, who had foreseen this fury of the pit, took care to be armed against it. He knew what people he had to deal with, and, to make them easy, put in his prologue double the usual dose of incense that is offered to their vanity ; for there is an established tax of this kind, from which no author is suffered to dispense himself. This author’s wise precaution succeeded, and the men that were before so redoubtable grew calm ; the charms of flattery, more strong than those of music, deprived them of all their fierceness.

“ You see, sir, that the pit is the same in all countries : it loves to be flattered, under the more genteel name of being complimented. If a man has tolerable address at panegyric, they swallow it greedily, and are easily quelled and intoxicated by the draught. Every one in particular thinks he merits the praise that is given to the whole in general ; the illusion operates, and the prologue is good, only because it is artfully directed. Every one saves his own blush by the authority of the multitude he makes

the facts and natural causes that made such a law necessary.

Although it had been taken for granted, from time imme-

a part of, which is, perhaps, the only circumstance in which a man can think himself not obliged to be modest.

“ The author having, by flattery, begun to tame this wild audience, proceeded entirely to reconcile it by the first scene of his performance. Two actors came in, one dressed in the English manner very decently, and the other with black eyebrows, a ribbon of an ell long under his chin, a bag-peruke immoderately powdered, and his nose all bedaubed with snuff. What Englishman could not know a Frenchman by this ridiculous picture ! The common people of London think we are indeed such sort of folks, and of their own accord, add to our real follies all that their authors are pleased to give us. But when it was found, that the man thus equipped, being also laced down every seam of his coat, was nothing but a cook, the spectators were equally charmed and surprised. The author had taken care to make him speak all the impertinencies he could devise, and for that reason, all the impertinencies of his farce were excused, and the merit of it immediately decided. There was a long criticism upon our manners, our customs, and above all, upon our cookery. The excellence and virtues of English beef were cried up, and the author maintained, that it was owing to the qualities of its juice, that the English were so courageous, and had such a solidity of understanding, which raised them above all the nations in Europe : he preferred the noble old English pudding beyond all the finest ragouts that were ever invented by the greatest geniuses that France has produced ; and all these ingenious strokes were loudly clapped by the audience.

The pit, biassed by the abuse that was thrown on the French, forgot that they came to damn the play, and maintain the ancient liberty of the stage. They were friends with the players, and

morial, that no company of comedians, could act plays, &c. without the royal license, or protection of some legal authority; a theatre was, notwithstanding, erected in Goodman's-Fields\*, about seven years ago, where plays, without any such license, were acted for some time unmolested, and with impunity. After a year or two, this playhouse was thought a nuisance, too near the city; upon which the Lord Mayor and Aldermen petitioned the crown to suppress it: what steps were taken, in favour of that petition, I know not, but common fame seemed to allow from what had, or had not been done in it, that acting plays in the said theatre was not evidently unlawful. However, this question of acting without a license, a little time after, came to a nearer decision in Westminster Hall. The occasion of bringing it thither was this: it happened that the purchasers† of the patent, to whom Mr. Booth and myself

even with the court itself, and contented themselves with the privilege left them, of lashing our nation as much as they pleased, in the room of laughing at the expense of the minister. The license of authors did not seem to be too much restrained, since the court did not hinder them from saying all the ill they could of the French.

“Intractable as the populace appear in this country, those who know how to take hold of their foibles, may easily carry their point. Thus is the liberty of the stage reduced to just bounds, and yet the English pit makes no farther attempt to oppose the new regulation. The law is executed without the least trouble, all the plays since having been quietly heard, and either succeeded, or not, according to their merit..”

\* This theatre was erected in the year 1729, by a Mr. Odell, in defiance of a strong opposition raised by many residents in the neighbourhood. See an account of this person, and his project, in the “*Biographia Dramatica*.”

† Highmore and Giffard.



had sold our shares, were at variance with the comedians, that were then left to their government, and the variance ended, in the chief of those comedians deserting, and setting up for themselves, in the little house in the Haymarket, in 1733, by which desertion the patentees were very much distressed, and considerable losers. Their affairs being in this desperate condition, they were advised to put the act of the twelfth of Queen Ann,\* against vagabonds, in force against these deserters, then acting in the Haymarket without license. Accordingly, one of their chief performers† was taken from the stage, by a justice of peace's warrant, and committed to Bridewell as one within the penalty of the said act. When the legality of this commitment was disputed in Westminster Hall, by all I could observe from the learned pleadings on both sides, (for I had the curiosity to hear them) it did not appear to me that the comedian so committed was within the description of the said act, he being a housekeeper, and having a vote for the Westminster members of Parliament. He was discharged, accordingly, and conducted through the hall, with the congratulations of the crowds that attended, and wished well to his cause.

The issue of this trial threw me, at that time, into a very

\* It was ordained by this act "that all persons pretending themselves to be patent-gatherers, or collectors for prisons, gaols, or hospitals, and wandering abroad for that purpose; all fencers, bearwards, *common players* of *interludes*, &c. should be deemed rogues and vagabonds." This act was enforced, by explanation and amendment, in the year 1737.

† This was Harper, a just and spirited comedian, who had the honour to compete with Quin in *Falstaff*, and the critics agreed, as Mr. Davis, "that though the latter was more judicious, Harper caused more laughter."—"Life of Garrick," vol. 1. ed. 1780.

odd reflection, *viz.* that if acting plays without license did not make the performers vagabonds, unless they wandered from their habitations so to do, how particular was the case of us three late managing actors, at the theatre royal, who in twenty years before had paid, upon an average, at least twenty thousand pounds, to be protected, as actors, from a law that has not since appeared to be against us. Now, whether we might certainly have acted without any license at all, I shall not pretend to determine; but this I have, of my own knowledge, to say, that in Queen Ann's reign the stage was in such confusion, and its affairs in such distress, that Sir John Vanbrugh and Mr. Congreve, after they had held it about one year, threw up the management of it, as an unprofitable post, after which a license for acting was not thought worth any gentleman's asking for, and almost seemed to go a-begging, till some time after, by the care, application, and industry of three actors, it became so prosperous, and the profits so considerable, that it created a new place, and a sinecure of a thousand pounds a-year, which the labour of those actors constantly paid to such persons as had, from time to time, merit or interest enough to get their names inserted as fourth managers in a license with them, for acting plays, &c. ; a preferment that many a *Sir Francis Wronghead* would have jumped at. But to go on with my story. This endeavour of the patentees to suppress the comedians acting in the Haymarket proving ineffectual, and no hopes of a reunion then appearing, the remains of the company left in Drury-lane were reduced to a very low condition. At this time a third purchaser, Charles Fleetwood, Esq.,\* stepped in; who, judging the

\* The transactions of this period are subsequent to the era which Cibber means to depict, and being brought in merely for the illustration of a legal principle, I shall abstain here from giving that

best time to buy, was when the stock was at the lowest price, struck up a bargain at once, for five parts in six of the patent; and, at the same time, gave the revolted comedians their own terms to return, and come under his government in Drury-lane, where they now continue to act, at very ample salaries, as I am informed in 1738. But (as I have observed) the late cause of the prosecuted comedian having gone so strongly in his favour, and the house in Goodman's Fields, too, continuing to act with as little authority, unmolested; these so tolerated companies gave encouragement to a broken wit,\* to collect a fourth company, who, for some time, acted plays in the Haymarket, which house the united Drury-lane comedians had lately quitted. This enterprising person, I say, (whom I do not chuse to name, unless it could be to his advantage, or that it were of importance) had sense enough to know that the best plays, with bad actors, would turn but to a very poor account, and therefore found it necessary to give the public some pieces of an extraordinary kind, the poetry of which, he conceived, ought to be so strong, that the greatest dunce of an actor could not spoil it. He knew, too, that as he was in haste to get money, it would take up less time to be intrepidly abusive, than decently entertaining; that, to draw the mob after him, he must rake the channel, and pelt their superiors; that, to show himself somebody, he must come up to Juvenal's advice, and stand the consequence:

*Aude, aliquid brevibus Gyaris, et carcere dignum  
Si vis esse aliquis.*——

Such, then, was the mettlesome modesty he set out with;

historical notice of the stage, which may be rendered more fitly in another place.

\* Fielding, the novelist, who stiled his actors the "Great Mogul's company of comedians."

upon this principle he produced several frank and free farces, that seemed to knock all distinctions of mankind on the head : religion, laws, governments, priests, judges, and ministers, were all laid flat, at the feet of this herculean satirist, this *Drawcansir* in wit, that spared neither friend nor foe ; who, to make his poetical fame immortal, like another Erostratus, set fire to his stage, by writing up to an act of parliament to demolish it. I shall not give the particular strokes of his ingenuity a chance to be remembered, by reciting them ; it may be enough to say, in general terms, they were so openly flagrant, that the wisdom of the legislature thought it high time to take a proper notice of them.

Having now shown by what means there came to be four theatres, besides a fifth for operas, in London, all open at the same time, and that while they were so numerous it was evident some of them must have starved, unless they fed upon the trash and filth of buffoonery and licentiousness ; I now come, as I promised, to speak of that necessary law which has reduced their number, and prevents the repetition of such abuses, in those that remain open for the public recreation.

While this law was in debate, a lively spirit, and uncommon eloquence was employed against it.\* It was urged, that one of the greatest goods we can enjoy, is liberty. (This we may grant to be an incontestible truth, without its being the least objection to this law.) It was said too, that to bring the stage under the restraint of a licenser, was leading the way to an attack upon the liberty

\* The eloquence alluded to was that of Lord Chesterfield, who delivered a speech against this restrictive bill, which has left immortal evidence to the intrepidity of his spirit, and the splendor of his understanding.

of the press. This amounts but to a jealousy at best, which I hope and believe all honest Englishmen have as much reason to think a groundless, as to fear it is a just, jealousy: for the stage and the press, I shall endeavour to show, are very different weapons to wound with. If a great man could be no more injured, by being personally ridiculed, or made contemptible, in a play, than by the same matter only printed, and read against him, in a pamphlet, or the strongest verse; then indeed the stage and the press might pretend to be upon an equal foot of liberty: but when the wide difference between these two liberties comes to be explained and considered, I dare say we shall find the injuries from one, capable of being ten times more severe and formidable than from the other: let us see, at least, if the case will not be vastly altered. Read what Mr. Collier, in his "Defence of the Short View of the Stage," &c. page 25, says to this point: he sets this difference in a clear light. These are his words:

The satire of a comedian, and another poet have a different effect upon reputation: a character of disadvantage, upon the stage, makes a stronger impression than elsewhere: reading is but hearing at second-hand; now hearing, at best, is a more languid conveyance, than sight. For, as Horace observes,

*Seguins irritant animum, demissa per aurem,  
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*

The eye is much more affecting, and strikes deeper into the memory, than the ear: besides, upon the stage, both the senses are in conjunction. The life of the actor fortifies the object, and awakens the mind to take hold of it.—Thus a dramatic abuse is rivetted, in the audience; a jest is improved into argument, and rallying grows up into reason: thus a character of scandal becomes almost indelible; a man goes for a blockhead, upon content, and he that is made a fool in a play, is often made one

for his life. It is true, he passes for such only among the prejudiced and unthinking; but these are no inconsiderable division of mankind. For these reasons, I humbly conceive the stage stands in need of a great deal of discipline and restraint: to give them an unlimited range, is in effect to make them masters of all moral distinctions, and to lay honour and religion at their mercy. To show greatness ridiculous, is the way to lose the use, and abate the value of the quality. Things made little in jest, will soon be so in earnest; for laughing and esteem are seldom bestowed on the same object.

If this was truth and reason (as sure it was) forty years ago, will it not carry the same conviction with it to these days, when there came to be a much stronger call for a reformation of the stage than when this author wrote against it, or perhaps than was ever known since the English stage had a being? And now let us ask another question. Does not the general opinion of mankind suppose that the honour and reputation of a minister is, or ought to be, as dear to him as his life? Yet when the law, in Queen Ann's time, had made even an unsuccessful attempt upon the life of a minister capital, could any reason be found that the fame and honour of his character should not be under equal protection? Was the wound that Guiscard gave to the late Lord Oxford, when a minister, a greater injury than the theatrical insult which was offered to a later minister, in a more valuable part—his character? Was it not as high time, then, to take this dangerous weapon of mimical insolence and defamation out of the hands of a mad poet, as to wrest the knife from the lifted hand of a murderer? And is not that law of a milder nature which prevents a crime, than that which punishes it, after it is committed? May not one think it amazing that the liberty of defaming lawful power and dignity should have been so eloquently contended for; or, especially,

that this liberty ought to triumph in a theatre, where the most able, the most innocent, and most upright person must himself be, while the wound is given, defenceless? How long must a man so injured lie bleeding, before the pain and anguish of his fame (if it suffers wrongfully) can be dispelled? Or say, he had deserved reproof and public accusation, yet the weight and greatness of his office never can deserve it from a public stage, where the lowest malice, by saucy parallels and abusive inuendoes, may do every thing but name him: but, alas, liberty is so tender, so chaste a virgin, that, it seems, not to suffer her to do irreparable injuries, with impunity, is a violation of her! It cannot surely be a principle of liberty, that would turn the stage into a Court of Inquiry, that would let the partial applauses of a vulgar audience give sentence upon the conduct of authority, and put impeachments into the mouth of a *Harlequin*? Will not every impartial man think that malice, envy, faction, and misrule, might have too much advantage over lawful power, if the range of such a stage liberty were unlimited, and insisted on to be enrolled among the glorious rights of an English subject?

I remember much such another antient liberty, which many of the good people of England were once extremely fond of; I mean that of throwing squibs and crackers at all spectators, without distinction, upon a Lord Mayor's day; but about forty years ago a certain nobleman happening to have one of his eyes burnt out by this mischievous merriment, it occasioned a penal law to prevent those sorts of jests from being laughed at for the future: yet I have never heard that the most zealous patriot ever thought such a law was the least restraint upon our liberty.

If I am asked, why I am so voluntary a champion for the honour of this law that has limited the number of play-

houses, and which now can no longer concern me, as a professor of the stage, I reply, that it being a law, so nearly relating to the theatre, it seems not at all foreign to my history to have taken notice of it; and as I have farther promised to give the public a true portrait of my mind, I ought fairly to let them see how far I am, or am not, a blockhead, when I pretend to talk of serious matters, that may be judged so far above my capacity: nor will it in the least discompose me, whether my observations are condemned or applauded. A blockhead is not always an unhappy fellow, and if the world will not flatter us, we can flatter ourselves; perhaps, too, it will be as difficult to convince us we are in the wrong, as that you wiser gentlemen are one tittle the better for your knowledge. It is yet a question with me, whether we weak heads have not as much pleasure, too, in giving our shallow reason a little exercise, as those clearer brains have, that are allowed to dive into the deepest doubts and mysteries; to reflect, or form a judgment upon remarkable things past, is as delightful to me, as it is to the gravest politician to penetrate into what is present, or to enter into speculations upon what is, or is not likely to come. Why are histories written, if all men are not to judge of them? Therefore, if my reader has no more to do than I have, I have a chance for his being as willing to have a little more upon the same subject, as I am to give it him.

When direct arguments against this bill were found too weak, recourse was had to dissuasive ones: it was said, that this restraint upon the stage would not remedy the evil complained of: that a play refused to be licensed, would still be printed, with double advantage, when it should be insinuated, that it was refused, for some strokes of wit, &c., and would be more likely, then, to have its effect among the people. However natural this conse-



quence may seem, I doubt it will be very difficult to give a printed satire, or libel, half the force or credit of an acted one. The most artful, or notorious lie, or strained allusion, that ever slandered a great man, may be read, by some people, with a smile of contempt, or, at worst, it can impose but on one person, at once: but when the words of the same plausible stuff shall be repeated on a theatre, the wit of it among a crowd of hearers is liable to be over-valued, and may unite and warm a whole body of the malicious, or ignorant, into a plaudit; nay, the partial claps of only twenty ill-minded persons, among several hundreds of silent hearers, shall be, and often have been, mistaken for a general approbation, and frequently draw into their party the indifferent, or inapprehensive, who rather than be thought not to understand the conceit, will laugh with the laughers, and join in the triumph. But, alas, the quiet reader of the same ingenious matter, can only like for himself; and the poison has a much slower operation upon the body of a people, when it is so retailed out, than when sold to a full audience by wholesale. The single reader, too, may happen to be a sensible, or unprejudiced person; and then the merry dose meeting with the antidote of a sound judgment, perhaps may have no operation at all: with such a one, the wit of the most ingenious satire, will only by its intrinsic truth or value gain upon his approbation; or if it be worth an answer, a printed falsehood may possibly be confounded by printed proofs against it. But against contempt and scandal, heightened and coloured by the skill of an actor, ludicrously infusing it into a multitude, there is no immediate defence to be made, or equal reparation to be had for it; for it would be but a poor satisfaction, at last, after lying long patient under the injury, that time only is to show (which would probably be the case) that the author of it was a desperate

indigent, that did it for bread. How much less dangerous or offensive, then, is the written than the acted scandal. The impression the comedian gives to it is a kind of double stamp upon the poet's paper, that raises it to ten times the intrinsic value. Might we not strengthen this argument, too, even by the eloquence that seemed to have opposed this law? I will say for myself, at least, that when I came to read the printed arguments against it, I could scarcely believe they were the same, that had amazed, and raised such admiration in me, when they had the advantage of a lively elocution, and of that grace and spirit which gave strength and lustre to them, in the delivery.

Upon the whole, if the stage ought ever to have been reformed; if to place a power *somewhere* of restraining its immoralities, was not inconsistent with the liberties of a civilised people, (neither of which, surely, any moral man of sense can dispute) might it not have shown a spirit too poorly prejudiced, to have rejected so rational a law, only because the honour and office of a minister might happen, in some small measure, to be protected by it?

But however little weight there may be in the observations I have made upon it, I shall for my own part always think them just; unless I should live to see, (which I do not expect) some future set of upright ministers use their utmost endeavours to repeal it.

And now we have seen the consequence of what many people are apt to contend for, variety of playhouses, how was it possible so many could honestly subsist, on what was fit to be seen? Their extraordinary number, of course, reduced them to live upon the gratification of such hearers as they knew would be best pleased with public offence; and public offence, of what kind soever, will always be a good reason for making laws to restrain it.

To conclude, let us now consider this law in a quite dif-

ferent light ; let us leave the political part of it quite out of the question : what advantage could either the spectators of plays, or the masters of playhouses have gained, by its having never been made ? How could the same stock of plays supply four theatres, which (without such additional entertainments as a nation of common sense ought to be ashamed of) could not well support two ? Satiety must have been the natural consequence of the same plays being twice as often repeated as now they need be ; and satiety puts an end to all tastes that the mind of man can delight in. Had, therefore, this law been made seven years ago, I should not have parted with my share in the patent under a thousand pounds more, than I received for it ; so that, as far as I am able to judge, both the public, as spectators, and the patentees, as undertakers, are, or might be, in a way of being better entertained, and more considerable gainers by it.

I now return to the state of the stage, where I left it, about the year 1697, from whence this pursuit of its immorality has led me farther than I first designed to have followed it.

## CHAP. IX.

*A small apology for writing on.—The different state of the two companies.—Wilks invited over from Dublin.—Estcourt from the same stage, the winter following.—Mrs. Oldfield's first admission to the Theatre Royal.—Her character.—The great theatre in the Haymarket built, for Betterton's company.—It answers not their expectation.—Some observations upon it.—A theatrical state secret.*

I NOW begin to doubt that the *gaieté du cœur* in which I first undertook this work, may have drawn me into a more laborious amusement than I shall know how to away with :\* for though I cannot say I have yet jaded my vanity, it is not impossible but, by this time, the most candid of my readers may want a little breath ; especially when they consider that all this load I have heaped upon their patience, contains but seven years of the forty-three I passed upon the stage ; the history of which period I have enjoined myself to transmit to the judgment (or oblivion) of posterity. However, even my dulness will find somebody to do it right: If my reader is an ill-natured one, he will be as much pleased to find me a dunce in my old age, as possibly he may have been to prove me a brisk blockhead in my

\* To *away with*.] This expression is scriptural. It occurs in the book of "Isaiah," and having been adopted by Shakspeare, has occasioned some very ignorant surprise among the commentators.

youth : but if he has no gall to gratify, and would (for his simple amusement) as well know how the playhouses went on forty years ago, as how they do now, I will honestly tell him the rest of my story as well as I can. Lest therefore the frequent digressions that have broken in upon it may have entangled his memory, I must beg leave just to throw together the heads of what I have already given him, that he may again recover the clue of my discourse.

Let him, then, remember, from the year 1662 to 1682,\* the various fortune of the (then) King's and Duke's two famous Companies ; their being reduced to one united ; the distinct characters I have given of thirteen actors, which, in the year 1690 were the most famous, then, remaining of them ; the cause of their being again divided in 1695, and the consequences of that division, till 1697 ; from whence I shall lead them to our second union in——hold ! let me see——ay, it was in that memorable year, when the two kingdoms of England and Scotland were made one. And I remember a particular that confirms me I am right in my chronology ; for the play of “Hamlet” being acted soon after, Estcourt, who then took upon him to say any thing, added a fourth line to Shakspeare's prologue to the play, in that play, which originally consisted but of three ; but Estcourt made it run thus :

For us, and for our tragedy,  
Thus stooping to your clemency,  
[This being a year of unity,]  
We beg your hearing patiently.

\* *From 1662 to 1682.* Cibber says, “from 1660 to 1684,” but as the “King's and Duke's” two famous companies, were not embodied till the spring of 1662, and united in November, 1682, I have corrected his erroneous dates.

'This new chronological line coming unexpectedly upon the audience, was received with applause, though several grave faces looked a little out of humour at it. However, by this fact, it is plain, our theatrical union happened in 1707. But to speak of it, in its place, I must go a little back again.

From 1697, to this union, both companies went on, without any memorable change in their affairs, unless it were that Betterton's people (however good in their kind) were most of them too far advanced in years to mend; and though we, in Drury-lane, were too young to be excellent, we were not too old to be better. But what will not satiety depreciate? For though I must own and avow, that, in our highest prosperity, I always thought we were greatly their inferiors; yet, by our good fortune of being seen in quite new lights, which several new-written plays had shown us in, we now began to make a considerable stand against them. One good new play, to a rising company, is of inconceivable value. In "Oroonoko," and (why may I not name another, though it be my own?) in "Love's Last Shift," and in the sequel of it, the "Relapse," several of our people showed themselves in a new style of acting, in which nature had not as yet been seen. I cannot here forget a misfortune that befel our society, about this time, by the loss of a young actor, Hildebrand Horden,\* who was killed at the bar of the Rose tavern, in a frivolous, rash, accidental quarrel; for which a late resident at Venice, Colonel Burgess, and several other persons of distinction, took their trials, and were acquitted. This young man had almost every natural gift that could promise an excellent actor; he had, besides, a good deal of tablewit and humour, with a handsome person, and was every day rising into public fa-

\* Horden was a respectable scholar; and complimented Powel, in a Latin encomium, on his "Treacherous Brothers."

vour. Before he was buried, it was observable that, two or three days together, several of the fair sex, well dressed, came in masks, (then frequently worn) and some in their own coaches, to visit this theatrical hero, in his shroud. He was the elder son of Dr. Horden, minister of Twickenham, in Middlesex. But this misfortune was soon repaired, by the return of Wilks, from Dublin, (who upon this young man's death, was sent for over) and lived long enough among us to enjoy that approbation from which the other was so unhappily cut off. The winter following, Estcourt, the famous mimic, of whom I have already spoken, had the same invitation from Ireland, where he had commenced actor. His first part here, at the Theatre Royal, was the *Spanish Friar*, in which, though he had remembered every look and motion of the late Tony Leigh, so far as to put the spectator very much in mind of him, yet it was visible through the whole, notwithstanding his exactness in the outlines; the true spirit, that was to fill up the figure, was not the same, but unskillfully daubed on, like a child's painting upon the face of a mezzo-tinto: it was too plain to the judicious, that the conception was not his own, but imprinted in his memory by another, of whom he only presented a dead likeness. But these were defects not so obvious to common spectators; no wonder, therefore, if by his being much sought after in private companies,\* he met with a sort of indulgence, not to say partiality, for what he sometimes did upon the stage.

In the year 1699, Mrs. Oldfield was first taken into the house, where she remained about a twelvemonth almost a mute, and unheeded, till Sir John Vanbrugh, who first re-

\* *Sought after in private companies.*] Estcourt is said in the "Spectator," to be "wholly employed in the agreeable service of wit and wine."

commended her, gave her the part of *Alinda*, in the "Pilgrim" revised. This gentle character happily became that want of confidence which is inseparable from young beginners, who, without it, seldom arrive to any excellence: notwithstanding, I own I was then so far deceived in my opinion of her, that I thought she had little more than her person, that appeared necessary to the forming a good actress; for she set out with so extraordinary a diffidence that it kept her too despondingly down, to a formal, plain, (not to say) flat manner of speaking. Nor could the silver tone of her voice, till after some time, incline my ear to any hope in her favour. But public approbation is the warm weather of a theatrical plant, which will soon bring it forward, to whatever perfection nature has designed it. However, Mrs. Oldfield (perhaps for want of fresh parts) seemed to come but slowly forward, till the year 1703. Our company, that summer, acted at Bath, during the residence of Queen Ann at that place. At that time it happened, that Mrs. Verbruggen, by reason of her last sickness, (of which she some few months after died) was left in London; and though most of her parts were of course, to be disposed of, yet so earnest was the female scramble for them, that only one of them fell to the share of Mrs. Oldfield—that of *Leonora*, in "Sir Courtly Nice;" a character of good plain sense, but not over elegantly written. It was in this part Mrs. Oldfield surprised me into an opinion of her having all the innate powers of a good actress, though they were yet but in the bloom of what they promised. Before she had acted this part, I had so cold an expectation from her abilities, that she could scarcely prevail with me to rehearse with her the scenes she was chiefly concerned in with *Sir Courtly* which I then acted. However, we ran them over, with a mutual inadvertency of one another. I seemed careless, as concluding that any assistance I could give her, would be to



little, or no purpose ; and she muttered out her words in a sort of misty manner, at my low opinion of her. But when the play came to be acted, she had a just occasion to triumph over the error of my judgment, by the (almost) amazement that her unexpected performance awaked me to ; so forward and sudden a step into nature I had never seen ; and what made her performance more valuable was, that I knew it all proceeded from her own understanding, untaught and unassisted by any one more experienced actor. Perhaps it may not be unacceptable, if I enlarge a little more upon the theatrical character of so memorable an actress.

Though this part of *Leonora*, in itself, was of so little value, that when she got more into esteem it was one of the several she gave away to inferior actresses, yet it was the first (as I have observed) that corrected my judgment of her, and confirmed me in a strong belief, that she could not fail, in very little time, of being what she was afterwards allowed to be, the foremost ornament of our theatre. Upon this unexpected sally, then, of the power and disposition of so unforeseen an actress, it was that I again took up the two first acts of the “ Careless Husband,” which I had written the summer before, and had thrown aside, in despair of having justice done to the character of *Lady Betty Modish*, by any one woman then among us ; Mrs. Verbruggen being now in a very declining state of health, and Mrs. Bracegirdle out of my reach, and engaged in another company : but, as I have said, Mrs. Oldfield having thrown out such new proffers of a genius, I was no longer at a loss for support ; my doubts were dispelled, and I had now a new call to finish it. Accordingly, the “ Careless Husband” took its fate upon the stage, the winter following, in 1704. Whatever favourable reception this comedy has met with from the public, it would be unjust in me not to place a large share of it to the account of Mrs. Oldfield ; not only

from the uncommon excellence of her action, but even from her personal manner of conversing. There are many sentiments in the character of *Lady Betty Modish*, that I may almost say, were originally her own, or only dressed with a little more care than when they negligently fell from her lively humour: had her birth placed her in a higher rank of life, she had certainly appeared in reality, what in this play she only excellently acted, an agreeable gay woman of quality, a little too conscious of her natural attractions. I have often seen her, in private societies, where women of the best rank might have borrowed some part of her behaviour, without the least diminution of their sense or dignity. And this very morning, where I am now writing at Bath, November the 11th, 1738, the same words were said of her by a lady of condition, whose better judgment of her personal merit, in that light, has emboldened me to repeat them. After her success in this character of higher life, all that nature had given her of the actress seemed to have risen to its full perfection: but the variety of her power could not be known, till she was seen in a variety of characters; which, as fast as they fell to her, she equally excelled in. Authors had much more from her performance than they had reason to hope for from what they had written for her; and none had less than another, but as their genius in the parts they allotted her was more or less elevated.

In the wearing of her person she was particularly fortunate; her figure was always improving to her thirty-sixth year; but her excellence in acting was never at a stand: and the last new character she shone in, *Lady Townly*, was a proof that *she* was still able to do more, if more could have been done for *her*. She had one mark of good sense, rarely known in any actor of either sex but herself. I have observed several with promising dispositions, very desirous of instruction at their first setting out; but no sooner had they

found their least account in it, than they were as desirous of being left to their own capacity, which they then thought would be disgraced by their seeming to want any farther assistance. But this was not Mrs. Oldfield's way of thinking; for, to the last year of her life, she never undertook any part she liked, without being importunately desirous of having all the helps in it, that another could possibly give her. By knowing so much herself, she found how much more there was of nature yet needful to be known. Yet it was a hard matter to give her any hint that she was not able to take or improve. With all this merit, she was tractable, and less presuming in her station, than several that had not half her pretensions to be troublesome: but she lost nothing by her easy conduct; she had every thing she asked for, which she took care should be always reasonable, because she hated as much to be grudged, as denied a civility. Upon her extraordinary action in the "Provoked Husband," the managers made her a present of fifty guineas more than her agreement, which never was more than a verbal one; for they knew she was above deserting them, to engage upon any other stage, and she was conscious they would never think it their interest to give her cause of complaint. In the last two months of her illness, when she was no longer able to assist them she declined receiving her salary, though, by her agreement, she was intitled to it. Upon the whole she was, to the last scene she acted, the delight of her spectators: why then may we not close her character with the same indulgence, with which Horace speaks of a commendable poem?

*Ubi plura nitent—non ego paucis*

*Offendor maculis—*

Where, in the whole, such various beauties shine,

'Twere idle upon errors to refine.

What more might be said of her as an actress, may be found in the preface to the "Provoked Husband," to which I refer the reader.

With the acquisition, then, of so advanced a comedian, as Mrs. Oldfield, and the addition of one so much in favour as Wilks, and by the visible improvement of our other actors, as Pinkethman, Johnson, Bullock, and I think I may venture to name myself in the number (but in what rank, I leave to the judgment of those who have been my spectators) the reputation of our company began to get ground; Mrs. Oldfield, and Mr. Wilks, by their frequently playing against one another in our best comedies, very happily supported that humour and vivacity which is so peculiar to our English stage. The French, our only modern competitors, seldom give us their lovers in such various lights: in their comedies, however lively a people they are by nature, their lovers are generally constant simple sighers, both of a mind, and equally distressed about the difficulties of their coming together; which naturally makes their conversation so serious, that they are seldom good company to their auditors: and though I allow them many other beauties of which we are too negligent, yet our variety of humour has excellencies that all their valuable observance of rules has never yet attained to. By these advantages, then, we began to have an equal share of the politer sort of spectators, who for several years could not allow our company to stand in any comparison with the other. But theatrical favour, like public commerce, will sometimes deceive the best judgments, by an unaccountable change of its channel; the best commodities are not always known to meet with the best markets. To this decline of the old company many accidents might contribute; as the too distant situation of their theatre; or their want of a better, for it was not then in the condition it now is; but small, and poorly

fitted up, within the walls of a Tennis *quarée* Court, which is of the lesser sort. Booth, who was then a young actor among them, has often told me of the difficulties Betterton then laboured under, and complained of; how impracticable he found it, to keep their body to that common order which was necessary for their support; of their relying too much upon their intrinsic merit; and though but few of them were young, even when they first became their own masters, yet they were all now ten years older, and consequently more liable to fall into an inactive negligence, or were only separately diligent, for themselves, in the sole regard of their benefit plays; which several of their principals knew at worst, would raise them contributions that would more than tolerably subsist them for the current year. But as these were too precarious expedients to be always depended upon, and brought in nothing to the general support of the numbers who were at salaries under them, they were reduced to have recourse to foreign novelties; L'Abbée, Balon, and Mademoiselle Subligny, three of the, then, most famous dancers of the French opera, were, at several times, brought over at extraordinary rates, to revive that sickly appetite which plain sense and nature had satiated. But, alas, there was no recovering to a sound constitution by those mere costly cordials; the novelty of a dance was but of a short duration, and perhaps hurtful in its consequence; for it made a play without a dance less endured, than it had been before, when such dancing was not to be had. But, perhaps, their exhibiting these novelties might be owing to the success we had met with in our more barbarous introducing of French mimics and tumblers the year before; of which Mr. Rowe thus complains, in his prologue to one of his first plays:

Must Shakspeare, Fletcher, and laborious Ben,  
Be left for Scaramouch and Harlequin?

While the crowd, therefore, so fluctuated from one house to another, as their eyes were more or less regaled than their ears, it could not be a question much in debate, which had the better actors ; the merit of either seemed to be of little moment ; and the complaint in the foregoing lines, though it might be just for a time, could not be a just one for ever ; because the best play that ever was written, may tire by being too often repeated, a misfortune naturally attending the obligation to play every day ; not that, whenever such satiety commences, it will be any proof of the play's being a bad one, or of its being ill acted. In a word, satiety is seldom enough considered, by either critics, spectators, or actors, as the true, not to say just, cause of declining audiences to the most rational entertainments : and though I cannot say I ever saw a good new play not attended with due encouragement, yet to keep a theatre daily open, without sometimes giving the public a bad old one, is more than, I doubt, the wit of human writers, or excellence of actors, will ever be able to accomplish. And, as both authors and comedians may have often succeeded, where a sound judgment would have condemned them, it might puzzle the nicest critic living, to prove in what sort of excellence the true value of either consisted : for if their merit were to be measured by the full houses they may have brought ; if the judgment of the crowd were infallible, I am afraid we shall be reduced to allow, that the "*Beggar's Opera*" was the best-written play, and *Sir Harry Wildair*, as Wilks played it, was the best acted part, that ever our English theatre had to boast of. That critic, indeed, must be rigid to a folly, that would deny either of them their due praise, when they severally drew such numbers after them ; all their hearers could not be mistaken ; and yet, if they were all in the right, what sort of fame will remain to those celebrated authors and actors, that had so long and

deservedly been admired, before these were in being? The only distinction I shall make between them is, that to write or act like the authors or actors of the latter end of the last century, I am of opinion, will be found a far better pretence to success, than to imitate these who have been so crowded to in the beginning of this. All I would infer from this explanation is, that though we had then the better audiences, and might have more of the young world on our side, yet this was no sure proof that the other company were not, in the truth of action, greatly our superiors. These elder actors then, besides the disadvantages I have mentioned, having only the fewer true judges to admire them, naturally wanted the support of the crowd, whose taste was to be pleased at a cheaper rate, and with coarser fare. To recover them, therefore, to their due estimation, a new project was formed, of building them a stately theatre in the Haymarket, by Sir John Vanbrugh, for which he raised a subscription of thirty persons of quality, at one hundred pounds each, in consideration whereof every subscriber, for his own life, was to be admitted to whatever entertainments should be publicly performed there, without farther payment for his entrance. Of this theatre I saw the first stone laid, on which was inscribed

THE  
LITTLE  
WHIG,

in honour to a lady of extraordinary beauty, then the celebrated toast and pride of that party.

In the year 1706, when this house was finished, Betterton and his co-partners dissolved their own agreement, and threw themselves under the direction of Sir John Vanbrugh and Mr. Congreve; imagining, perhaps, that the conduct of two such eminent authors might give a more

prosperous turn to their condition; that the plays it would now be their interest to write for them, would soon recover the town to a true taste, and be an advantage that no other company could hope for; that, in the interim till such plays could be written, the grandeur of their house, as it was a new spectacle, might allure the crowd to support them: but if these were their views, we shall see that their dependence upon them was too sanguine. As to their prospect of new plays, I doubt it was not enough considered, that good ones were plants of a slow growth; and though Sir John Vanbrugh had a very quick pen, yet Mr. Congreve was too judicious a writer, to let any thing come hastily out of his hands: as to their other dependence, the house, they had not yet discovered that almost every proper quality and convenience of a good theatre had been sacrificed or neglected, to show the spectator a vast, triumphal piece of architecture; and that the best play, for the reasons I am going to offer, could not but be under great disadvantages, and be less capable of delighting the auditor there, than it could have been in the plain theatre they came from. For what could their vast columns, their gilded cornices, their immoderate high roofs avail, when scarce one word in ten could be distinctly heard in it? Nor had it, then, the form it now stands in, which necessity, two or three years after, reduced it to. At the first opening it, the flat ceiling, that is now over the orchestra, was then a semi-oval arch, that sprung fifteen feet higher from above the cornice: the ceiling over the pit, too, was still more raised, being one level line from the highest back part of the upper gallery, to the front of the stage: the front-boxes were a continued semi-circle, to the bare walls of the house on each side: this extraordinary, and superfluous space occasioned such an undulation from the voice of every actor, that, generally, what they said sound-



ed like the gabbling of so many people in the lofty aisles in a cathedral. The tone of a trumpet, or the swell of an eunuch's holding note, it is true, might be sweetened by it; but the articulate sounds of a speaking voice were drowned by the hollow reverberations of one word upon another. To this inconvenience, why may we not add that of its situation; for at that time it had not the advantage of almost a large city, which has since been built, in its neighbourhood? Those costly spaces of Hanover, Grosvenor, and Cavendish Squares, with the many and great adjacent streets about them, were then all but so many green fields of pasture, from whence they could draw little or no sustenance, unless it were that of a milk diet. The city, the inns of court, and the middle part of the town, which were the most constant support of a theatre, and chiefly to be relied on, were now too far out of the reach of an easy walk; and coach-hire is often too hard a tax upon the pit and gallery. But from the vast increase of the buildings I have mentioned, the situation of that theatre has since that time received considerable advantages; a new world of people of condition are nearer to it than formerly, and I am of opinion, that if the auditory part were a little more reduced to the model of that in Drury-lane, an excellent company of actors would, now, find a better account in it, than in any other house in this populous city. Let me not be mistaken. I say, an excellent company, and such as might be able to do justice to the best of plays, and throw out those latent beauties in them, which only excellent actors can discover and give life to. If such a company were now there, they would meet with a quite different set of auditors than other theatres have lately been used to: polite hearers would be content with polite entertainments; and I remember the time when plays, without the aid of farce or pantomime, were as decently attended as operas,

or private assemblies; where a noisy sloven would have passed his time as unasily, in a front-box, as in a drawing-room; when a hat upon a man's head there would have been looked upon as a sure mark of a brute or a booby: but of all this I have seen, too, the reverse, where in the presence of ladies, at a play, common civility has been set at defiance, and the privilege of being a rude clown, even to a nuisance, has, in a manner, been demanded as one of the rights of English liberty. Now, though I grant that liberty is so precious a jewel that we ought not to suffer the least ray of its lustre to be diminished, yet methinks the liberty of seeing a play in quiet, has as laudable a claim to protection, as the privilege of not suffering you to do it, has to impunity. But since we are so happy as not to have a certain power among us, which, in another country, is called the police, let us rather bear this insult, than buy its remedy at too dear a rate; and let it be the punishment of such wrong-headed savages, that they never will nor can know the true value of that liberty which they so stupidly abuse: such vulgar minds possess their liberty, as profligate husbands do fine wives, only to disgrace them. In a word, when liberty boils over, such is the scum of it. But to our new erected theatre.

Not long before this time, the Italian opera began first to steal into England; but in as rude a disguise, and as unlike itself as possible; in a lame, hobbling translation into our own language, with false quantities, or metre out of measure, to its original notes, sung by our own unskilful voices, with graces misapplied to almost every sentiment, and with action lifeless and unmeaning, through every character. The first Italian performer that made any distinguished figure in it, was Valentini, a true sensible singer, at that time, but of a throat too weak to sustain those melodious warblings, for which the fairer sex have since ido-

lised his successors. However, this defect was so well supplied by his action, that his hearers bore with the absurdity of his singing his first part of *Turnus*, in "*Camilla*," all in Italian, while every other character was sung and recited to him in English. This I have mentioned, to show not only our framontane taste, but that the crowded audiences which followed it to Drury-lane, might be another occasion of their growing thinner in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

To strike in, therefore, with this prevailing novelty, Sir John Vanbrugh and Mr. Congreve opened their new Hay-market theatre, with a translated opera, to Italian music, called the "*Triumph of Love*," but this not having in it the charms of "*Camilla*," either from the inequality of the music or voices, had but a cold reception, being performed but three days, and those not crowded. Immediately, upon the failure of this opera, Sir John Vanbrugh produced his comedy called the "*Confederacy*," taken (but greatly improved) from the "*Bourgeois à la Mode*" of Dancour. Though the fate of this play was something better, yet I thought it was not equal to its merit, for it is written with an uncommon vein of wit and humour; which confirms me in my former observation, that the difficulty of hearing distinctly in that, then, wide theatre, was no small impediment to the applause that might have followed the same actors in it, upon every other stage; and, indeed, every play acted there, before the house was altered, seemed to suffer from the same inconvenience. In a word, the prospect of profits from this theatre was so very barren, that Mr. Congreve, in a few months, gave up his share and interest in the government of it wholly to Sir John Vanbrugh. But Sir John being sole proprietor of the house, was, at all events, obliged to do his utmost to support it. As he had a happier talent of throwing the English spirit

into his translation of French plays than any former author who had borrowed from them, he, in the same season, gave the public three more of that kind, called the "Cuckold in Conceit," from the "Cocu Imaginaire" of Moliere; "Squire Trelooby," from his "Monsieur de Pourceaugnac," and the "Mistake," from the "Dépit Amoureux" of the same author. Yet all these, however well executed, came to the ear in the same undistinguished utterance, by which almost all their plays had equally suffered: for what few could plainly hear, it was not likely a great many could applaud.

It must farther be considered, too, that this company were not now what they had been, when they first revolted from the patentees in Drury-lane, and became their own masters in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Several of them, excellent in their different talents, were now dead; as Smith, Kynaston, Sandford, and Leigh: Mrs. Betterton, and Underhill being at this time also superannuated pensioners, whose places were generally but ill supplied: nor could it be expected that Betterton himself, at past seventy, could retain his former force and spirit, though he was yet far distant from any competitor. Thus, then, were these remains of the best set of actors that, I believe, were ever known, at once, in England, by time, death, and the satiety of their hearers, mouldering to decay.

It was now the town-talk that nothing but a union of the two companies could recover the stage to its former reputation; which opinion was certainly true. One would have thought, too, that the patentee of Drury-lane could not have failed to close with it, he being, then, on the prosperous side of the question, having no relief to ask for himself, and little more to do in the matter, than to consider what he might safely grant. But it seems this was not his way of counting; he had other persons who had great

claims to shares in the profits of this stage, which profits, by a union, he foresaw would be too visible to be doubted of, and might raise up a new spirit in those adventurers, to revive their suits at law with him; for he had led them a chase in Chancery several years, and when they had driven him into a contempt of that court, he conjured up a spirit in the shape of six and eight pence a-day, that constantly struck the tipstaff blind whenever he came near him. He knew the intrinsic value of delay, and was resolved to stick to it, as the surest way to give the plaintiffs enough of it. And by this expedient our good master had long walked about, at his leisure, cool and contented as a fox, when the hounds were drawn off, and gone home from him. But whether I am right or not in my conjectures, certain it is, that this close master of Drury-lane had no inclination to a union, as will appear by the sequel.

Sir John Vanbrugh knew, too, that to make a union worth his while, he must not seem too hasty for it; he therefore found himself under a necessity, in the mean time, of letting his whole theatrical farm to some industrious tenant, that might put it into better condition. This is that crisis, as I observed in the eighth chapter, when the royal license for acting plays, &c. was judged of so little value, as not to have one suitor for it. At this time, then, the master of Drury-lane happened to have a sort of premier agent in his stage affairs, that seemed in appearance as much to govern the master, as the master himself did to govern his actors: but this person was under no stipulation, or salary, for the service he rendered; but had gradually wrought himself into the master's extraordinary confidence and trust, from an habitual intimacy, a cheerful humour, and an indefatigable zeal for his interest. If I should farther say, that this person has been well known in almost every metropolis in Europe; that few private

men have, with so little reproach, run through more various turns of fortune; that, on the wrong side of three score, he has yet the open spirit of a hale young fellow of five and twenty; that though he still chuses to speak what he thinks, to his best friends, with an undisguised freedom, he is, notwithstanding, acceptable to many persons of the first rank and condition; that any one of them (provided he likes them) may now send him for their service to Constantinople, at half a day's warning; that time has not yet been able to make a visible change in any part of him, but the colour of his hair, from a fierce coal-black, to that of a milder milk-white. When I have taken this liberty with him, methinks it cannot be taking a much greater, if I at once should tell you, that this person was Mr. Owen Swiny,\* and that it was to him Sir John Vanbrugh, in this

\* Mr. Swiny, or McSwiny, on his return from Italy, procured a place in the custom-house, and was also made keeper of the king's mews. He died on the 2d of October, 1754, and having long been an admirer of Mrs. Woffington, bequeathed her the whole of his property.

Swiny is the "old man," of whom Davies, in his "Dramatic Miscellanies," relates the following anecdote:

"Small matters, they say, often serve as preludes to mighty quarrels. In the year 1754, the play of "Henry the Fourth" was acted at the theatre in Drury-lane. Barry was the *Hotspur*; a very beautiful and accomplished actress condescended, in order to give strength to the play, to act the trifling character of *Lady Percy*; Berry was the *Falstaff*. The house was far from crowded; for the public could no more bear to see another *Falstaff*, while Quin was on the stage, than they would now flock to see a new *Shylock*, as long as Macklin continues to have strength fit to represent 'the Jew which Shakspeare drew.'

"A very celebrated comic actress triumphed in the barrenness of the pit and boxes; she threw out some expressions

exigence of his theatrical affairs, made an offer of his actors, under such agreements of salary as might be made with them; and of his house, clothes, and scenes, with the queen's license to employ them, upon payment of only the casual rent of five pounds, upon every acting day, and not to exceed seven hundred pounds in the year. Of this proposal Mr. Swiny desired a day or two to consider; for, however he might like it, he would not meddle in any sort, without the consent and approbation of his friend and patron, the master of Drury-lane. Having given the reasons why this patentee was averse to a union, it may now seem less a wonder, why he immediately consented that Swiny should take the Haymarket house, &c. and continue that company to act against him; but the real truth was, that he had a mind both companies should be clandestinely

against the consequence of the *Lady Percy*. This produced a very cool, but cutting, answer from the other; who reminded the former of her playing, very lately, to a much thinner audience, one of her favourite parts. And now, the ladies, not being able to restrain themselves within the bounds of cool conversation, a most terrible fray ensued. I do not believe that they went so far as pulling of caps, but their altercation would not have disgraced the females of Billingsgate. While the two great actresses were thus entertaining each other in one part of the green-room, the admirer of *Lady Percy*, an old gentleman who afterwards bequeathed her a considerable fortune, and the brother of the comic lady, were more seriously employed. The cicisbeo struck the other with his cane; thus provoked, he very calmly laid hold of the old man's jaw. 'Let go my jaw, you villain!' and 'Throw down your cane, sir!' were repeatedly echoed by the combatants. Barry, who was afraid lest the audience should hear full as much of the quarrel as of the play, rushed into the green-room, and put an end to the battle. The printsellers laid hold of this dispute, and published a print called 'The Green-room Scuffle.'

under one and the same interest ; and yet in so loose a manner, that he might declare his verbal agreement with Swiny good, or null and void, as he might best find his account in either. What flattered him that he had this wholesome project, and Swiny to execute it, both in his power, was, that at this time, Swiny happened to stand in his books debtor to cash, upwards of two hundred pounds. But here, we shall find, he overrated his security. However, Swiny as yet followed his orders ; he took the Hay-market theatre, and had, farther, the private consent of the patentee to take such of his actors from Drury-lane, as, either from inclination or discontent, might be willing to come over to him in the Hay-market. The only one he made an exception of was myself: for though he chiefly depended upon his singers and dancers, he said it would be necessary to keep some one tolerable actor with him, that might enable him to set those machines a-going. Under this limitation of not entertaining me, Swiny seemed to acquiesce, till after he had opened with the so-recruited company in the Haymarket. The actors that came to him from Drury-lane, were Wilks, Estcourt, Mills,\*

\* Our first notice of this actor is found in the "*Roscus Anglicanus*," where Downs, who seems anxious to dispatch his subject, says summarily that he "excels in tragedy," but without making the remotest allusion to any characters in which his talent had been displayed.

John Mills the elder was, in person, inclined to the athletic size ; his features were large, though not expressive ; his voice was full, but not flexible ; and his deportment was manly, without being graceful or majestic. He was considered one of the most useful actors that ever served in a theatre, but though invested by the patronage of Wilks with many parts of the highest order, he had no pretensions to quit the secondary line in which he ought



Keen,\* Johnson, Bullock, Mrs. Oldfield, Mrs. Rogers, and some few others of less note. But I must here let you

to have been placed. Steele (1) taxes him very broadly with a want of "sentiment," and insinuates that by making gesture too much his study, he neglected the better attributes of his art.

On the death of Betterton, or soon after, Wilks, who took upon himself to regulate the theatrical cast, gave *Macbeth*, with great partiality, to Mills, while Booth and Powel were condemned to represent the inferior parts of *Banquo* and *Lenox*. Mills, though he spoke the celebrated soliloquy on time,—

\* To-morrow, and to-morrow, etc.,

with propriety, feeling, and effect, wanted genius to realise the turbulent scenes in which this character abounds. So much, indeed, was his deficiency perceived, that the indignation of a country gentleman broke out one night, during the performance of this play, in a very odd manner. The 'squire, after having been heartily tired with Mills, on the appearance of his old companion, Powel, in the fourth act, exclaimed, loud enough to be heard by the audience, "For God's sake, George, give us a speech, and let me go home." (2)

One of the best parts sustained by Mills, was that of *Pierre*, which he acted so much to the taste of the public, that the applause it produced him exceeded all that was bestowed upon his best efforts in every thing else. He also acted *Ventidius* with the true spirit of a rough and generous old soldier, and in *Bajazet*, by the aid of his strong, deep, melodious voice, he displayed more than ordinary power. (3)

(1) "Tattler;" No. 201.

(2) "Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. 2, p. 132.

(3) Aaron Hill, no mean judge of acting, was very severe upon Mills in this personation, and even made the mistakes in his manner a subject of preceptive remark.

"Mr. Mills found out that a great noise was one sure mark of anger; but he forgot that all this noise in the anger of a sovereign, should take its mea-

know, that this project was formed and put in execution all in very few days, in the summer season, when no theatre

I recollect an incident of the same sort occurring at Bristol, where a very indifferent actor, declaimed so long and to such little purpose, that an honest farmer, who sat in the pit, started up with evident signs of disgust, and waving his hand, to motion the speaker off, cried out, "Tak' un away, tak' un away, and let's have another."

It is supposed that Mills died in November, 1736, respected by the public as a decent actor, and beloved by his friends as a worthy man. Nor can a higher tribute, perhaps, be paid to his memory; for though wanting the glitter of genius, it possesses the lustre of virtue; and, if life may be resembled to a garment, what is genius but the spangling that adorns it, while virtue is the stuff of which it is composed?

\* Theophilus Keen received his first instructions in acting from Mr. Ashbury, of the Dublin theatre, in which he made his appearance about the year 1695. He most probably came into the Drury-lane company with Johnson and others, when Rich had beaten up for recruits. On the opening of the new house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, he went over to it, and, according to Chetwood, had a share not only of the management, but in the profit and loss, which latter speculation proved so disastrous to him, that he died in the year 1719, of a broken heart. He was buried in the church of St. Clement-Danes, and so much does he seem to have been respected, that more than two hundred persons in deep mourning, attended his funeral.

The influence he possessed in the theatre sometimes led him to assume such parts as *Edgar*, *Oroonoko*, and *Essex*, while his

sure from his dignity, and the decorum proper to his condition. Mr. M.—, again, was lucky enough to guess right, that a captive king, in fury and despair, should move with turbulence and agitation; but it never came into his head that there is a turbulence without bullying, and an agitation without awkwardness."—Victor's "History of the Theatres;" vol. 2, p. 200.

was open. To all which I was entirely a stranger, being at this time at a gentleman's house in Gloucestershire, scribbling, if I mistake not, the "Wife's Resentment."

The first word I heard of this transaction, was by letter from Swiny, inviting me to make one in the Haymarket company, whom he hoped I could not but now think the stronger party. But, I confess, I was not a little alarmed at this revolution : for I considered, that I knew of no visible fund to support these actors, but their own industry ; that all his recruits from Drury-lane would want new clothing ; and that the warmest industry would be always labouring up hill, under so necessary an expense, so bad a situation, and so inconvenient a theatre. I was always of opinion, too, that in changing sides, in most conditions, there generally were discovered more unforeseen inconveniencies than visible advantages ; and that, at worst, there would always some sort of merit remain with fidelity, though unsuccessful. Upon these considerations, I was only thankful for the offers made me from the Haymarket, without accepting them ; and soon after came to town, towards the usual time of their beginning to act, to offer my service to our old master. But I found our company so thinned, that it was almost impracticable to bring any one tolerable play upon the stage. When I asked him where were his actors, and in what manner he intended to proceed, he replied,

excellence lay in *Clytus*, and characters of a similar cast. His figure and voice, though neither elegant nor soft, were good, and his action was so complete, that it obtained for him the epithet of majestic, and when he spoke those lines of the *King*, in "Hamlet," where he descants upon the dignity that "doth hedge" a monarch, his look and whole deportment were so commanding, that the audience accompanied them always with the loudest applause.

“ Don’t you trouble yourself ; come along, and I’ll show you.” He then led me about all the by-places in the house, and showed me fifty little back-doors, dark closets, and narrow passages ; in alterations and contrivances of which kind he had busied his head most part of the vacation ; for he was scarcely ever without some notable joiner, or a bricklayer extraordinary, in pay, for twenty years. And there are so many odd obscure places about a theatre, that his genius in nook-building was never out of employment ; nor could the most vain-headed author be more deaf to an interruption in reciting his works, than our wise master was, while entertaining me with the improvements he had made in his invisible architecture ; all which, without thinking any one part of it necessary, though I seemed to approve, I could not help, now and then, breaking in upon his delight, with the impertinent question of—“ But, master, where are your actors ?” But, it seems, I had taken a wrong time for this sort of inquiry ; his head was full of matters of more moment and, (as you find) I was to come another time for an answer : a very hopeful condition I found myself in, under the conduct of so profound a virtuoso, and so considerate a master ! But, to speak of him seriously, and to account for this disregard to his actors, his notion was, that singing and dancing, or any sort of exotic entertainments, would make an ordinary company of actors too hard for the best set, who had only plain plays to subsist on. Now, though I am afraid too much might be said in favour of this opinion, yet I thought he laid more stress upon that sort of merit than it would bear ; as I therefore found myself of so little value with him, I could not help setting a little more upon myself, and was resolved to come to a short explanation with him. I told him I came to serve him at a time when many of his best actors had deserted him ; that he might now have the refusal of me ; but I could not af-

ford to carry the compliment so far as to lessen my income by it ; that I therefore expected either my casual pay to be advanced, or the payment of my former salary made certain, for as many days as we had acted the year before.—No, he was not willing to alter his former method ; but I might chuse whatever parts I had a mind to act of theirs who had left him. When I found him, as I thought, so insensible or impregnable, I looked gravely in his face, and told him he knew upon what terms I was willing to serve him ; and took my leave. By this time, the Haymarket company had begun acting to audiences something better than usual, and were all paid their full salaries, a blessing they had not felt, in some years, in either house before. Upon this success, Swiny pressed the patentee to execute the articles they had as yet only verbally agreed on, which were in substance, that Swiny should take the Haymarket house in his own name, and have what actors he thought necessary from Drury-lane, and after all payments punctually made, the profits should be equally divided between these two undertakers. But, soft and fair. Rashness was a fault, that had never yet been imputed to the patentee ; certain payments were methods he had not of a long, long time been used to ; that point still wanted time for consideration. But Swiny was as hasty as the other was slow, and was resolved to know what he had to trust to, before they parted ; and to keep him the closer to his bargain, he stood upon his right of having me added to that company, if I was willing to come into it. But this was a point as absolutely refused on one side, as insisted on on the other. In this contest, high words were exchanged on both sides, till, in the end, this their last private meeting came to an open rupture : but before it was publicly known, Swiny, by fairly letting me into the whole transaction, took effectual means to secure me in his interest. When the mystery of the patentee's in-

difference to me was unfolded, and that his slighting me was owing to the security he relied on of Swiny's not daring to engage me, I could have no further debate with myself which side of the question I should adhere to. To conclude, I agreed, in two words, to act with Swiny ; and from this time, every change that happened in the theatrical government, was a nearer step to that twenty years of prosperity, which actors, under the management of actors, not long afterwards enjoyed. What was the immediate consequence of this last desertion from Drury-lane, shall be the subject of another chapter.

## CHAP. X.

*The recruited actors, in the Haymarket encouraged by a subscription.—Drury-lane, under a particular management.—The power of a Lord Chamberlain over the theatres considered.—How it had been formerly exercised.—A digression to tragic authors.*

HAVING shown the particular conduct of the patentee, in refusing so fair an opportunity of securing to himself both companies under his sole power and interest, I shall now lead the reader, after a short view of what passed in this new establishment of the Haymarket theatre, to the accidents that, the year following, compelled the same patentee to receive both companies, united, into the Drury-lane theatre, notwithstanding his disinclination to it.

It may, now, be imagined that such a detachment of actors, from Drury-lane, could not but give a new spirit to those in the Haymarket; not only by enabling them to act each others' plays to better advantage, but by an emulous industry, which had lain too long inactive among them, and without which, they plainly saw, they could not be sure of subsistence. Plays, by this means, began to recover a good share of their former esteem and favour; and the profits of them, in about a month, enabled our new manager to discharge his debt (of something more than two hundred pounds) to his old friend the patentee, who had now left him and his troop, in trust, to fight their own battles. The greatest inconvenience they still laboured under was the im-

moderate wideness of their house; in which, as I have observed, the difficulty of hearing may be said to have buried half the auditors' entertainment. This defect seemed evident from the much better reception several new plays (first acted there) met with when they afterwards came to be played by the same actors in Drury-lane: of this number were the "Beaux' Stratagem," and the "Wife's Resentment;" to which I may add, the "Double Gallant." This last was a play made up of what little was tolerable in two or three others that had no success, and were laid aside as so much poetical lumber; but by collecting and adapting the best parts of them all into one play, the "Double Gallant" has had a place, every winter, amongst the public entertainments, these thirty years. As I was only the compiler of this piece, I did not publish it in my own name; but as my having but a hand in it could not be long a secret, I have been often treated as a plagiarist on that account: not that I think I have any right to complain of whatever would detract from the merit of that sort of labour. Yet a cobbler may be allowed to be useful, though he is not famous; and I hope a man is not blamable for doing a little good, though he cannot do as much as another. But so it is; twopenny critics must live, as well as eighteen-penny authors.

While the stage was thus recovering its former strength, a more honourable mark of favour was shown to it than it was ever known before or since to have received. The then Lord Halifax was not only the patron of the men of genius of his time, but had likewise a generous concern for the reputation and prosperity of the theatre, from whence the most elegant dramatic labours of the learned, he knew, had often shone in their brightest lustre. A proposal, therefore, was drawn up, and addressed to that noble lord, for his approbation and assistance, to raise a public subscrip-



tion for reviving three plays of the best authors, with the full strength of the company ; every subscriber to have three tickets, for the first day of each play, for his single payment of three guineas. This subscription his lordship so zealously encouraged, that, from his recommendation chiefly, in a very little time it was completed. The plays were " Julius Cæsar" of Shakspeare ; the " King and no King" of Fletcher ; and the comic scenes of Dryden's " Marriage à la Mode," and of his " Maiden Queen," put together, for it was judged that as these comic episodes were utterly independent of the serious scenes they were originally written to, they might on this occasion be as well episodes either to the other, and so make up five livelier acts between them : at least the project so well succeeded, that those comic parts have never since been replaced, but were continued to be jointly acted, as one play, several years after.

By the aid of this subscription, which happened in 1707, and by the additional strength and industry of this company, not only the actors (several of which were handsomely advanced in their salaries) were duly paid, but the manager himself, too, at the foot of his account stood a considerable gainer.

At the same time the patentee of Drury-lane went on in his usual method of paying extraordinary prices to singers, dancers, and other exotic performers, which were as constantly deducted out of the sinking salaries of his actors. It is true, his actors, perhaps, might not deserve much more than he gave them ; yet, by what I have related, it is plain he chose not to be troubled with such as visibly had deserved more : for it seems he had not purchased his share of the patent to mend the stage, but to make money of it : and to say truth, his sense of every thing to be shown there, was much upon a level with the taste of the multitude,

whose opinion and whose money weighed with him full as much, as that of the best judges. His point was to please the majority, who could more easily comprehend any thing they saw, than the daintiest things that could be said to them. But in this notion he kept no medium ; for, in my memory, he carried it so far, that he was (some few years before this time) actually dealing for an extraordinary large elephant,\* at a certain sum, for every day he might think fit to show the tractable genius of that vast quiet creature, in any play or farce, in the theatre (then standing) in Dorset-garden. But from the jealousy which so formidable a rival had raised in his dancers, and by his bricklayer's assuring him that, if the walls were to be opened wide enough for its entrance, it might endanger the fall of the house, he gave up his project, and with it so hopeful a prospect of making the receipts of the stage run higher than all the wit and force of the best writers had ever yet raised them to.

About the same time of his being under this disappointment, he put in practice another project of as new, though not of so bold a nature ; which was, his introducing a set of rope-dancers into the same theatre, for the first day of whose performance he had given out some play in which I had a material part : but I was hardy enough to go into the pit, and acquaint the spectators near me, that I hoped they would not think it a mark of my disrespect to them, if I declined acting upon any stage that was brought to so low a disgrace as ours was like to be by that day's entertainment. My excuse was so well taken, that I never after found any ill consequences, or heard of the least disapprobation of it : and the whole body of actors, too, protesting against such

\* We have seen this admirable scheme realised of late years, by the proprietors of Covent-garden.

an abuse of their profession, our cautious master was too much alarmed and intimidated to repeat it.

After what I have said, it will be no wonder that all due regards to the original use and institution of the stage should be utterly lost or neglected: nor was the conduct of this manager easily to be altered, while he had found the secret of making money out of disorder and confusion: for, however strange it may seem, I have often observed him inclined to be cheerful in the distresses of his theatrical affairs, and equally reserved and pensive when they went smoothly forward with a visible profit. Upon a run of good audiences he was more frightened to be thought a gainer, which might make him accountable to others, than he was dejected with bad houses, which, at worst, he knew would make others accountable to him: and as, upon a moderate computation, it cannot be supposed that the contested accounts of a twenty years' wear and tear in a play-house could be fairly adjusted by a master in chancery, under four-score years more, it will be no surprise, that by the neglect, or rather the discretion of other proprietors, in not throwing away good money after bad, this hero of a manager, who alone supported the war, should in time so fortify himself by delay, and so tire his enemies, that he became sole monarch of his theatrical empire, and left the quiet possession of it to his successors.

If these facts seem too trivial for the attention of a sensible reader, let it be considered, that they are not chosen fictions, to entertain, but truths necessary to inform him under what low shifts and disgraces, what disorders and revolutions, the stage laboured, before it could recover that strength and reputation wherewith it began to flourish towards the latter end of Queen Ann's reign; and which it continued to enjoy for a course of twenty years following.

But let us resume our account of the new settlement in the Haymarket.

It may be a natural question, why the actors whom Swiny brought over to his undertaking, in the Haymarket, would tie themselves down to limited salaries; for though he, as their manager, was obliged to make them certain payments, it was not certain that the receipts would enable him to do it; and since their own industry was the only visible fund they had to depend upon, why would they not, for that reason, insist upon their being sharers as well of possible profits, as losses? How far in this point they acted right or wrong, will appear from the following state of their case.

It must first be considered, that this scheme of their desertion was all concerted and put in execution in a week's time, which short warning might make them overlook that circumstance, and the sudden prospect of being delivered from having seldom more than half their pay, was a contentment that had bounded all their farther views. Besides, as there could be no room to doubt of their receiving their full pay, previous to any profits that might be reaped by their labour, and as they had no great reason to apprehend those profits could exceed their respective salaries so far as to make them repine at them, they might think it but reasonable to let the chance of any extraordinary gain be on the side of their leader and director. But, farther, as this scheme had the approbation of the court, these actors, in reality, had it not in their power to alter any part of it: and what induced the court to encourage it was, that by having the theatre and its manager more immediately dependent on the power of the Lord Chamberlain, it was not doubted but the stage would be recovered into such a reputation as might now do honour to that absolute command,

which the court, or its officers, seemed always fond of having over it.

Here, to set the constitution of the stage in a clearer light, it may not be amiss to look back a little on the power of a Lord Chamberlain, which, as may have been observed, in all changes of the theatrical government, has been the main spring without which no scheme, of what kind soever, could be set in motion. My intent is not to inquire how far, by law, this power has been limited or extended; but, merely as an historian, to relate facts to gratify the curious, and then leave them to their own reflections. This, too, I am the more inclined to, because there is no one circumstance which has affected the stage, wherein so many spectators, from those of the highest rank to the vulgar, have seemed more positively knowing, or less informed in.

Though in all the letters patent for acting plays, &c., since King Charles the First's time, there has been no mention of the Lord Chamberlain, or of any subordination to his command or authority, yet it was still taken for granted, that no letters patent, by the bare omission of such a great officer's name, could have superseded, or taken out of his hands, that power which, time out of mind, he always had exercised over the theatre. The common opinions then abroad were, that if the profession of actors was unlawful, it was not in the power of the crown to license it; and, if it were not unlawful, it ought to be free and independent, as other professions; and that a patent to exercise it was only an honorary favour from the crown, to give it a better grace of recommendation to the public. But as the truth of this question seemed to be wrapt in a great deal of obscurity in the old laws, made in former reigns, relating to players, &c., it may be no wonder that the best companies of actors should be desirous of taking shelter under the visible power of a Lord Chamberlain, who, they knew,

had, at his pleasure, favoured and protected, or borne hard upon them : but be all this as it may, a Lord Chamberlain, from whencesoever his power might be derived, had, till of later years, had always an implicit obedience paid to it : I shall now give some few instances in what manner it was exercised.

What appeared to be most reasonably under his cognisance was the licensing or refusing new plays, or striking out what might be thought offensive in them ; which province had been, for many years, assigned to his inferior officer, the Master of the Revels ;\* yet was not the license irrevocable ; for several plays, though acted by that permission, had been silenced afterwards. The first instance of this kind that common fame has delivered down to us, is that of the “ Maid’s Tragedy,” of Beaumont and Fletcher, which was forbidden in King Charles the Second’s time, by an order from the Lord Chamberlain. For what reason this interdiction was laid upon it, the politics of those days have only left us to guess. Some said, that the killing of the king in that play, while the tragical death of King Charles the First was then so fresh in people’s memory, was an object too horribly impious for a public entertainment. What makes this conjecture seem to have some foundation is, that the celebrated Waller, in compliment to that court, altered the last act of this play (which, is printed at the end of his works) and gave it a new catastrophe, wherein the life of the king is loyally saved, and the lady’s matter made up, with a less terrible reparation. Others have given out, that a repenting mistress, in a romantic revenge of her dishonour, killing the king in the very bed he expected her to come into, was showing a too dangerous example to other *Evadnes*, then shining at court

\* This office was instituted in the time of Edward the Sixth.

in the same rank of royal distinction ; who, if ever their consciences should have run equally mad, might have had frequent opportunities of putting the expiation of their frailty into the like execution. But this, I doubt, is too deep a speculation, or too ludicrous a reason, to be relied on ; it being well known, that the ladies then in favour were not so nice in their notions as to think their preferment their dishonour, or their lover a tyrant : besides, that easy monarch loved his roses without thorns ; nor do we hear that he much chose to be himself the first gatherer of them.

The “ Lucius Junius Brutus ” of Nat. Lee was, in the same reign, silenced after the third day of acting it ; it being objected, that the plan and sentiments of it had too boldly vindicated, and might inflame republican principles.

A prologue (by Dryden) to the “ *Prophetess*,” was forbidden by the Lord Dorset, after the first day of its being spoken. This happened when King William was prosecuting the war in Ireland. It must be confessed that this prologue had some familiar, metaphorical sneers at the revolution itself ; and as the poetry of it was good, the offence of it was less pardonable.

The tragedy of “ *Mary Queen of Scotland* ” had been offered to the stage twenty years before it was acted ; but from the profound penetration of the Master of the Revels, who saw political spectres in it that never appeared in the presentation, it had lain so long upon the hands of the author ; who had at last the good fortune to prevail with a nobleman to favour his petition to Queen Ann, for permission to have it acted : the queen had the goodness to refer the merit of his play to the opinion of that noble person, although he was not her majesty’s Lord Chamberlain ; upon whose report of its being, every way, an innocent piece, it was soon after acted with success.

Reader, by your leave.—I will but just speak a word or two to any author that has not yet written one line of his next play, and then I will come to my point again. What I would say to him is this: sir, before you set pen to paper, think well and principally of your design, or chief action, towards which, every line you write ought to be drawn, as to its centre: if we can say of your finest sentiments, this or that might be left out, without maiming the story you would tell us, depend upon it that the fine thing is said in a wrong place; and though you may urge that a bright thought is not to be resisted, you will not be able to deny that those very fine lines would be much finer, if you could find a proper occasion for them: otherwise, you will be thought to take less advice from Aristotle or Horace than from poet *Bays*, in the “*Rehearsal*,” who very smartly says—“What the devil is the plot good for, but to bring in fine things?” Compliment the state of your hearers as much as you please with them, provided they belong to your subject; but don’t, like a dainty preacher, who has his eyes more upon this world than the next, leave your text for them. When your fable is good, every part of it will cost you much less labour to keep your narration alive, than you will be forced to bestow upon those elegant discourses that are not absolutely conducive to your catastrophe, or main purpose: scenes of that kind show but, at best, the unprofitable or injudicious spirit of a genius. It is but a melancholy commendation of a fine thought, to say, when we have heard it, “Well! but what’s all this to the purpose?” Take, therefore, in some part, example by the author\* last mentioned. There are three plays of his, the “*Earl of Essex*,” “*Anna Bullen*,” and “*Mary Queen of Scots*,” which, though they are all written in the most bar-

\* John Banks.



ren, barbarous stile that was ever able to keep possession of the stage, have all interested the hearts of his auditors. To what then could this success be owing, but to the intrinsic and naked value of the well-conducted tales he has simply told us ? There is something so happy in the disposition of all his fables ; all his chief characters are thrown into such natural circumstances of distress, that their misery or affliction wants very little assistance from the ornaments of stile, or words to speak them. When a skilful actor is so situated, his bare plaintive tone of voice, the cast of sorrow from his eye, his slowly graceful gesture, his humble sighs of resignation under his calamities ; all these, I say, are sometimes, without a tongue, equal to the strongest eloquence. At such a time, the attentive auditor supplies from his own heart whatever the poet's language may fall short of in expression, and melts himself into every pang of humanity, which the like misfortunes in real life could have inspired.

After what I have observed, whenever I see a tragedy defective in its fable, let there be never so many fine lines in it, I hope I shall be forgiven, if I impute that defect to the idleness, the weak judgment, or barren invention of the author.

If I should be asked, why I have not always myself followed the rules I would impose upon others, I can only answer, that whenever I have not, I lie equally open to the same critical censure. But having often observed a better than ordinary stile thrown away upon the loose and wandering scenes of an ill-chosen story, I imagined these observations might convince some future author of how great advantage a fable well planned must be to a man of any tolerable genius.

All this, I own, is leading my reader out of the way ; but if he has as much time upon his hands as I have, (provided

we are neither of us tired) it may be equally to the purpose, what he reads, or what I write of. But as I have no objection to method when it is not troublesome, I return to my subject.

Hitherto we have seen no very unreasonable instance of this absolute power of a Lord Chamberlain, though we were to admit that no one knew of any real law, or construction of law, by which this power was given him. I shall now offer some facts relating to it, of a more extraordinary nature, which I leave my reader to give a name to.

About the middle of King William's reign, an order of the Lord Chamberlain was then subsisting, that no actor of either company should presume to go from one to the other, without a discharge from their respective managers,\* and the permission of the Lord Chamberlain. Notwithstanding such order, Powel, being uneasy at the favour Wilks was then rising into, had, without such discharge, left Drury-lane theatre, and engaged himself to that of Lincoln's Inn Fields: but, by what follows, it will appear that this order was not so much intended to do both of them good, as to do that which the court chiefly favoured (Lincoln's Inn Fields) no harm. For when Powel grew dissatisfied at his station

\* This order was superfluous, because in the patent granted to Killegrew and D'Avenant that very prohibition was inserted :

And the better to preserve amity and correspondency betwixt the said companies, and that the one may not encroach upon the other by any indirect means, we will and ordain, that no actor or other person employed about either of the said theatres, erected by the said Sir William D'Avenant and Thomas Killegrew, or either of them, or deserting his company, shall be received by the governor or any of the said other company, or any other person or persons, to be employed in acting, or in any matter relating to the stage, without the consent and approbation of the governor of the company, whereof the said person so ejected or deserting was a member, signified under his hand and seal.

there, too, he returned to Drury-lane (as he had before gone from it) without a discharge : but, halt a little here, on this side of the question : the order was to stand in force, and the same offence against it, now, was not to be equally passed over. He was the next day taken up by a messenger, and confined to the porter's-lodge, where, to the best of my remembrance, he remained about two days ; when the managers of Lincoln's Inn Fields, not thinking an actor of his loose character worth their farther trouble, gave him up ; though, perhaps, he was released for some better reason. Upon this occasion, the next day, behind the scenes at Drury-lane, a person of great quality, in my hearing, inquiring of Powel into the nature of his offence, after he had heard it, told him, that if he had had patience or spirit enough to have staid in his confinement till he had given him notice of it, he would have found him a handsomer way of coming out of it.

Another time the same actor, Powel, was provoked at Will's Coffee-house, in a dispute about the playhouse affairs, to strike a gentleman whose family had been sometimes masters of it ; a complaint of this insolence was, in the absence of the Lord Chamberlain, immediately made to the Vice Chamberlain, who so highly resented it, that he thought himself bound in honour to carry his power of redressing it as far as it could possibly go : for Powel having a part in the play that was acted the day after, the Vice Chamberlain sent an order to silence the whole company, for having suffered Powel to appear upon the stage, before he had made that gentleman satisfaction, although the masters of the theatre had had no notice of Powel's misbehaviour ; however, this order was obeyed, and remained in force for two or three days, till the same authority was pleased, or advised, to revoke it. From the measures this injured gentleman took for his redress, it may be judged how far it was

taken for granted that a Lord Chamberlain had an absolute power over the theatre.

I shall now give an instance of an actor who had the resolution to stand upon the defence of his liberty, against the same authority, and was relieved by it.

In the same king's reign, Dogget, who though, from a severe exactness in his nature, he could be seldom long easy in any theatre, where irregularity, not to say injustice, too often prevailed, yet, in the private conduct of his affairs, he was a prudent, honest man. He therefore took an unusual care, when he returned to act under the patent, in Drury-lane, to have his articles drawn firm and binding : but having some reason to think the patentee had not dealt fairly with him, he quitted the stage, and would act no more, rather chusing to lose his, whatever unsatisfied, demands, than go through the chargeable and tedious course of law to recover it. But the patentee, who (from other people's judgment) knew the value of him, and who wanted, too, to have him sooner back than the law could possibly bring him, thought the surer way would be, to desire a shorter redress from the authority of the Lord Chamberlain. Accordingly, upon his complaint, a messenger was immediately dispatched to Norwich, where Dogget then was, to bring him up, in custody : but doughty Dogget, who had money in his pocket, and the cause of liberty at his heart, was not in the least intimidated by this formidable summons. He was observed to obey it with a particular cheerfulness, entertaining his fellow-traveller, the messenger, all the way in the coach (for he had protested against riding) with as much humour as a man of his business might be capable of tasting. And as he found his charges were to be defrayed, he, at every inn, called for the best dainties the country could afford, or a pretended weak ap-

petite could digest.. At this rate they jollily rolled on, more with the air of a jaunt than a journey, or a party of pleasure, than of a poor devil in durance. Upon his arrival in town, he immediately applied to the Lord Chief Justice Holt, for his *habeas corpus*. As his case was something particular, that eminent and learned minister of the law took a particular notice of it: for Dogget was not only discharged, but the process of his confinement (according to common fame) had a censure passed upon it in court, which I doubt I am not lawyer enough to repeat. To conclude, the officious agents in this affair finding that, in Dogget, they had mistaken their man, were mollified into milder proceedings, and (as he afterwards told me) whispered something in his ear, that took away Dogget's farther uneasiness about it.

By these instances we see how naturally power, only founded on custom, is apt, where the law is silent, to run into excesses, and while it laudably pretends to govern others, how hard it is to govern itself. But since the law has lately opened its mouth, and has said plainly, that some part of this power to govern the theatre shall be, and is placed in a proper person; and as it is evident, that the power of that white staff, ever since it has been in the noble hand that now holds it, has been used with the utmost lenity, I would beg leave of the murmuring multitude, who frequent the theatre, to offer them a simple question or two, *viz.* "Pray, gentlemen, how came you, or rather your forefathers, never to be mutinous upon any of the occasional facts I have related? And why have you been so often tumultuous upon a law's being made that only confirms a less power than was formerly exercised, without any law to support it? You cannot, sure, say such discontent is either just or natural, unless you allow it a maxim

in your politics, that power exercised without law, is a less grievance than the same power exercised according to law ? ”

Having thus given the clearest view I was able of the usual regard paid to the power of a Lord Chamberlain, the reader will more easily conceive what influence and operation that power must naturally have in all theatrical revolutions ; and particularly in the complete re-union of both companies, which happened in the year following.

## CHAP. XI.

*Some chimerical thoughts of making the Stage useful.—Some to its reputation.—The patent unprofitable to all the proprietors but one.—A fourth part of it given away to Colonel Brett.—A digression to his memory.—The two companies of actors re-united, by his interest and management.—The first direction of Operas, only, given to Mr. Swiny.*

FROM the time that the company of actors in the Hay-market was recruited with those from Drury-lane, and came into the hands of their new director, Swiny, the theatre, for three or four years following, suffered so many convulsions, and was thrown every other winter under such different interests and management, before it came to a firm and lasting settlement, that I am doubtful if the most candid reader will have patience to go through a full and fair account of it. And yet I would fain flatter myself that those who are not too wise to frequent the theatre (or have wit enough to distinguish what sort of sights there either do honour or disgrace to it) may think their national diversion no contemptible subject for a more able historian than I pretend to be. If I have any particular qualification for the task more than another, it is that I have been an ocular witness of the several facts that are to fill up the rest of my volume; and am, perhaps, the only person living (however unworthy) from whom the same materials can be collected: but let them come from whom they may, whether, at best, they will be worth reading, perhaps a

judgment may be better formed after a patient perusal of the following digression.

In whatever cold esteem the stage may be among the wise and powerful, it is not so much a reproach to those who contentedly enjoy it in its lowest condition, as that condition of it is to those who (though they cannot but know to how valuable a public use a theatre, well established, might be raised) yet in so many civilised nations have neglected it. This, perhaps, will be called thinking my own wiser than all the wise heads in Europe. But I hope a more humble sense will be given to it; at least I only mean, that if so many governments have their reasons for their disregard of their theatres, those reasons may be deeper than my capacity has yet been able to dive into. If, therefore, my simple opinion is a wrong one, let the singularity of it expose me: and though I am only building a theatre in the air, it is there, however, at so little expense, and in so much a better taste than any I have yet seen, that I cannot help saying of it, as a wiser man did (it may be) upon a wiser occasion:

— Si quid novisti rectius istis,

Candidus imperti; si non—

give me leave to play with my project in fancy.

I say, then, that as I allow nothing is more liable to debase and corrupt the minds of a people than a licentious theatre, so, under a just and proper establishment, it were possible to make it, as apparently, the school of manners and of virtue. Were I to collect all the arguments that might be given for my opinion, or to enforce it by exemplary proofs, it might swell this short digression to a volume; I shall therefore trust the validity of what I have laid down to a single fact, that may be still fresh in the memory of many living spectators. When the tragedy of “Cato” was first acted, let us call to mind the noble spirit



of patriotism which that play then infused into the breasts of a free people that crowded to it; with what affecting force was that most elevated of human virtues recommended! Even the false pretenders to it felt an unwilling conviction, and made it a point of honour to be foremost in their approbation; and this, too, at a time when the fermented nation had their different views of government. Yet the sublime sentiments of liberty, in that venerable character, raised in every sensible hearer such conscious admiration, such compelled assent to the conduct of a suffering virtue, as even *demand*ed two almost irreconcilable parties to embrace, and join in their equal applauses of it. Now, not to take from the merit of the writer, had that play never come to the stage, how much of this valuable effect of it must have been lost? It then could have had no more immediate weight with the public, than our poring upon the many antient authors, through whose works the same sentiments have been, perhaps, less profitably dispersed, though amongst millions of readers; but by bringing such sentiments to the theatre, and into action, what a superior lustre did they shine with? There, *Cato* breathed again in life: and though he perished in the cause of liberty, his virtue was victorious, and left the triumph of it in the heart of every melting spectator. If effects like these are laudable; if the representation of such plays can carry conviction with so much pleasure to the understanding, have they not vastly the advantage of any other human helps to eloquence? What equal merit can be found to lead or stimulate the mind to a quicker sense of truth and virtue, or warm a people into the love and practice of such principles, as might be at once a defence and honour to their country? In what shape could we listen to virtue with equal delight, or appetite of instruction! The mind of man is naturally free, and when he is

compelled or menaced into any opinion that he does not readily conceive, he is more apt to doubt the truth of it, than when his capacity is led by delight into evidence and reason. To preserve a theatre in this strength and purity of morals, is, I grant, what the wisest nations have not been able to perpetuate, or to transmit long to their posterity : but this difficulty will rather heighten than take from the honour of the theatre. The greatest empires have decayed for want of proper heads to guide them, and the ruins of them sometimes have been the subject of theatres, that could not be themselves exempt from as various revolutions. Yet may not the most natural inference from all this be, that the talents requisite to form good actors, great writers, and true judges, were like those of wise and memorable ministers, as well the gifts of fortune as of nature, and not always to be found in all climes or ages. Or can there be a stronger modern evidence of the value of dramatic performances, than that in many countries where the papal religion prevails, the holy policy (though it allows not to an actor Christian burial) is so conscious of the usefulness of his art, that it will frequently take in the assistance of the theatre, to give even sacred history in a tragedy, a recommendation to the more pathetic regard of their people ? How can such principles, in the face of the world, refuse the bones of a wretch the lowest benefit of Christian charity, after having admitted his profession (for which they deprive him of that charity) to serve the solemn purposes of religion ? How far, then, is this religious inhumanity short of that famous painter's, who, to make his crucifix a master-piece of nature, stabbed the innocent hireling from whose body he drew it ; and, having heightened the holy portrait with his last agonies of life, then sent it to be the consecrated ornament of an altar ? Though we have only the authority of common fame for this story, yet be it true

or false, the comparison will still be just. Or let me ask another question more humanly political.

How came the Athenians to lay out an hundred thousand pounds upon the decorations of one single tragedy of Sophocles? Not, surely, as it was merely a spectacle for idleness or vacancy of thought to gape at, but because it was the most rational, most instructive, and most delightful composition that human wit had yet arrived at; and, consequently, the most worthy to be the entertainment of a wise and warlike nation. And it may be still a question, whether the Sophocles inspired this public spirit, or this public spirit inspired the Sophocles.

But, alas, as the power of giving or receiving such inspirations, from either of these causes, seems pretty well at an end, now I have shot my bolt, I shall descend to talk more like a man of the age I live in: for, indeed, what is all this to a common English reader? Why, truly, as Shakespeare terms it, “Caviare to the multitude.” Honest John Trott will tell you, that, if he were to believe what I have said of the Athenians, he is, at most, but astonished at it; but that if the twentieth part of the sum I have mentioned were to be applied out of the public money, to the setting off the best tragedy the nicest noddle in the nation could produce, it would probably raise the passions higher in those that did not like it, than in those that did; it might as likely meet with an insurrection, as the applause of the people, and so, mayhap, be fitter for the subject of a tragedy, than for a public fund to support it. Truly, Mr. Trott, I cannot but own that I am very much of your opinion. I am only concerned, that the theatre has not a better pretence to the care and further consideration of those governments where it is tolerated; but as what I have said will not probably do it any great harm, I hope I have not put you out of patience, by throwing a few good wishes after an old acquaintance.

To conclude this digression. If for the support of the stage, what is generally shown there must be lowered to the taste of common spectators; or if it is inconsistent with liberty to mend that vulgar taste, by making the multitude less merry there; or by abolishing every low and senseless jollity in which the understanding can have no share; whenever, I say, such is the state of the stage, it will be as often liable to unanswerable censure, and manifest disgraces. Yet there *was* a time, not yet out of many people's memory, when it subsisted upon its own rational labours; when even success attended an attempt to reduce it to decency; and when actors themselves were hardy enough to hazard their interest, in pursuit of so dangerous a reformation. And this crisis I am myself as impatient as any tired reader can be to arrive at. I shall therefore endeavour to lead him the shortest way to it. But as I am a little jealous of the badness of the road, I must reserve to myself the liberty of calling upon any matter, in my way, for a little refreshment to whatever company may have the curiosity or goodness to go along with me.

When the sole managing patentee at Drury-lane, for several years, could never be persuaded or driven to any account with the adventurers. Sir Thomas Skipwith (who, if I am rightly informed, had an equal share with him) grew so weary of the affair, that he actually made a present of his entire interest in it, upon the following occasion.

Sir Thomas happened, in the summer preceding the re-union of the companies, to make a visit to an intimate friend of his, Colonel Brett, of Sandywell, in Gloucestershire; where the pleasantness of the place, and the agreeable manner of passing his time there, had raised him to such a gallantry of heart, that, in return to the civilities of his friend the colonel, he made him an offer of his whole right in the patent; but not to overrate the value of his present, told

him, he himself had made nothing of it these ten years : but the colonel (he said) being a greater favourite of the people in power, and (as he believed) among the actors too, than himself was, might think of some scheme to turn it to advantage, and in that light, if he liked it, it was at his service. After a great deal of raillery on both sides, of what Sir Thomas had *not* made of it, and the particular advantages the colonel was likely to make of it, they came to a laughing resolution that an instrument should be drawn the next morning of an absolute conveyance of the premises. A gentleman of the law, well known to them both, happening to be a guest there, at the same time, the next day produced the deed, according to his instructions, in the presence of whom, and of others, it was signed, sealed, and delivered to the purposes therein contained.

This transaction may be another instance (as I have elsewhere observed) at how low a value the interests in a theatrical license were then held ; though it was visible, from the success of Swiny in that very year, that, with tolerable management, they could, at no time, have failed of being a profitable purchase.

The next thing to be considered was, what the colonel should do with his new theatrical commission, which, in another's possession, had been of so little importance. Here it may be necessary to premise, that this gentleman was the first of any consideration, since my coming to the stage, with whom I had contracted a personal intimacy ; which might be the reason, why, in this debate, my opinion had some weight with him : of this intimacy, too, I am the more tempted to talk, from the natural pleasure of calling back, in age, the pursuits and happy ardours of youth long past, which, like the ideas of a delightful spring, in a winter's rumination, are sometimes equal to the former enjoyment of them. I shall, therefore, rather chuse in this place to

gratify myself than my reader, by setting the fairest side of this gentleman in view, and by indulging a little conscious vanity, in showing how early in life I fell into the possession of so agreeable a companion. Whatever failings he might have to others, he had none to me; nor was he, where he had them, without his valuable qualities to balance or soften them. Let, then, what was not to be commended in him rest with his ashes, never to be raked into: but the friendly favours I received from him, while living, give me still a pleasure in paying this only mite of my acknowledgment in my power to his memory. And if my taking this liberty may find pardon from several of his fair relations, still living, for whom I profess the utmost respect, it will give me but little concern, though my critical readers should think it all impertinence.

This gentleman, then, Henry, was the eldest son of Henry Brett, Esq., of Cowley, in Gloucestershire, who coming early to his estate of about two thousand a-year, by the usual negligences of young heirs, had, before this his eldest son came of age, sunk it about to half that value, and that not wholly free from incumbrances. Mr. Brett, whom I am speaking of, had his education, and I might say, ended it, at the university of Oxford; for though he was settled some time after at the Temple, he so little followed the law there, that his neglect of it made the law (like some of his fair and frail admirers) very often follow *him*. As he had an uncommon share of social wit, and a handsome person, with a sanguine bloom in his complexion, no wonder they persuaded him that he might have a better chance of fortune, by throwing such accomplishments into the gayer world, than by shutting them up in a study. The first view that fires the head of a young gentleman of this modish ambition, just broke loose from business, is to cut a figure (as they call it) in a side-box, at the play, from whence their next

step is to the green-room, behind the scenes, sometimes their *non ultra*. Hither, at last then, in this hopeful quest of his fortune, came this gentleman-errant, not doubting but the fickle dame, while he was thus qualified to receive her, might be tempted to fall into his lap. And though, possibly, the charms of our theatrical nymphs might have their share in drawing him thither, yet, in my observation, the most visible cause of his first coming was a more sincere passion he had conceived for a fair, full-bottomed periwig, which I then wore in my first play of the "Fool in Fashion,"\* in the year 1695. For it is to be noted, that the beaux of those days were of a quite different cast from the modern stamp, and had more of the stateliness of the peacock in their mien, than (which now seems to be their highest emulation) the pert air of a lapwing. Now, whatever contempt philosophers may have for a fine periwig, my friend, who was not to despise the world, but to live in it, knew very well that so material an article of dress upon the head of a man of sense, if it became him, could never fail of drawing to him a more partial regard and benevolence than could possibly be hoped for in an ill-made one. This, perhaps, may soften the grave censure which so youthful a purchase might otherwise have laid upon him: in a word, he made his attack upon this periwig, as your young fellows generally do upon a lady of pleasure; first, by a few,

\* The heads of our actors at the period spoken of, were covered with wigs of an immoderate size, a fashion that arose in the reign of Charles the Second, and was not entirely disused in public till about the year 1720. They were flowing and flaxen, and both Booth and Wilks, as well as Cibber, are said to have bestowed forty guineas each on the exorbitant thatching of their heads.(1)

familiar praises of her person, and then a civil inquiry into the price of it. But upon his observing me a little surprised at the levity of his question about a fop's periwig, he began to rally himself with so much wit and humour upon the folly of his fondness for it, that he struck me with an equal desire of granting any thing, in my power, to oblige so facetious a customer. This singular beginning of our conversation, and the mutual laughs that ensued upon it, ended in an agreement to finish our bargain that night, over a bottle.

If it were possible the relation of the happy indiscretions which passed between us that night could give the tenth part of the pleasure I then received from them, I could still repeat them with delight; but as it may be doubtful whether the patience of a reader may be quite so strong as the vanity of an author, I shall cut it short, by only saying, that single bottle was the sire of many a jolly dozen that, for some years following, like orderly children, whenever they were called for, came into the same company. Nor, indeed, did I think from that time, whenever he was to be had, any evening could be agreeably enjoyed without him. But the long continuance of our intimacy, perhaps, may be thus accounted for.

He who can taste wit in another may, in some sort, be said to have it himself: now, as I always had, and (I bless myself for the folly) still have a quick relish of whatever did or can give me delight, this gentleman could not but see the youthful joy I was generally raised to, whenever I had the happiness of a *tête à tête* with him, and it may be a moot point, whether wit is not as often inspired by a proper attention, as by the brightest reply, to it. Therefore, as he had wit enough for any two people, and I had attention enough for any four, there could not well be wanting a sociable delight on either side. And though it may be true



that a man of a handsome person is apt to draw a partial ear to every thing he says, yet this gentleman seldom said any thing that might not have made a man of the plainest person agreeable. Such a continual desire to please, it may be imagined, could not but, sometimes, lead him into a little venial flattery, rather than not succeed in it. And I, perhaps, might be one of those flies that were caught in this honey. As I was then a young successful author, and an actor in some unexpected favour, whether deservedly or not imports not ; yet such appearances, at least, were plausible pretences enough for an amicable adulation to enlarge upon ; and the sallies of it a less vanity than mine might not have been able to resist. Whatever this weakness on my side might be, I was not alone in it ; for I have heard a gentleman of condition say, who knew the world as well as most men that live in it, that let his discretion be ever so much upon its guard, he never fell into Mr. Brett's company without being loth to leave it, or carrying away a better opinion of himself from it. If his conversation had this effect among the men, what must we suppose to have been the consequence, when he gave it a yet softer turn among the fair sex ? Here, now, a French novelist would tell you fifty pretty lies of him ; but as I chuse to be tender of secrets of that sort, I shall only borrow the good breeding of that language, and tell you, in a word, that I knew several instances of his being *un homme à bonne fortune*. But though his frequent successes might generally keep him from the usual disquiets of a lover, he knew this was a life too liquorish to last ; and therefore had reflection enough to be governed by the advice of his friends, and turn these his advantages of nature to a better use.

Among the many men of condition with whom his conversation had recommended him to an intimacy, Sir Thomas Skipwith had taken a particular inclination to him,

and, as he had the advancement of his fortune at heart, introduced him where there was a lady\* who had enough in her power to disencumber him of the world, and make him, every way, easy for life.

While he was in pursuit of this affair, which no time was to be lost in, (for the lady was to be in town but for three weeks) I one day found him idling behind the scenes, before the play was begun. Upon sight of him, I took the usual freedom he allowed me, to rate him roundly for the madness of not improving every moment in his power, in what was of such consequence to him. "Why are you not," said I, "where you know you only should be? If your design should once get wind in the town, the ill-will of your enemies, or the sincerity of the lady's friends, may soon blow up your hopes, which, in your circumstances of life, cannot be long supported, by the bare appearance of a gentleman."—But, it is impossible to proceed, without some apology for the very familiar circumstance that is to follow; yet, as it might not be so trivial in its effect as I fear it may be in the narration, and is a mark of that intimacy, which, it is necessary should be known, had been between us, I will honestly make bold with my scruples, and let the plain truth of my story take its chance for contempt or approbation.

After twenty excuses, to clear himself of the neglect I had so warmly charged him with, he concluded them, with telling me, he had been out all the morning, upon business,

\* This "lady" was the most infamous and unnatural Countess of Macclesfield, who bastardised her son, Savage, in order to procure a separation from her husband, with whom she had long lived upon uneasy terms. To the discreet conduct of this lady in managing Brett, it is said that Cibber owes a chief incident in his "Careless Husband."

and that his linen was too much soiled, to be seen in company. "Oh, ho!" said I, "is that all? Come along with me; we will soon get over that dainty difficulty." Upon which I hauled him, by the sleeve, into my shifting-room, he either staring, laughing, or hanging back all the way. There, when I had locked him in, I began to strip off my upper clothes, and bad him do the same; still he either did not, or would not seem to understand me, and continuing his laugh, cried, "What is the puppy mad?" "No, no, only positive," said I; "for, look you, in short, the play is ready to begin, and the parts that you and I are to act to day, are not of equal consequence; mine of *Young Reveller* (in "Greenwich-Park") is but a rake; but whatever you may be, you are not to appear so; therefore take my shirt, and give me yours; for depend upon it, stay here you shall not, and so go about your business." To conclude, we fairly changed linen, nor could his mother's have wrapped him up more fortunately; for in about ten days he married the lady. In a year or two after his marriage, he was chosen a member of that Parliament which was sitting when King William died; and, upon raising of some new regiments, was made Lieutenant Colonel to that of Sir Charles Hotham: but as his ambition extended not beyond the bounds of a park-wall, and a pleasant retreat in the corner of it, which, with too much expense, he had just finished, he, within another year, had leave to resign his company to a younger brother.

This was the figure in life he made, when Sir Thomas Skipwith thought him the most proper person to oblige (if it could be an obligation) with the present of his interest in the patent. And from these anecdotes of my intimacy with him, it may be less a surprise, when he came to town invested with this new theatrical power, that I should be the first person to whom he took any notice of it. And

notwithstanding he knew I was then engaged in another interest, at the Haymarket, he desired we might consider together of the best use he could make of it, assuring me, at the same time, he should think it of none to himself, unless it could, in some shape, be turned to my advantage. This friendly declaration, though it might be generous in him to make, was not needful to incline me, in whatever might be honestly in my power, whether by interest or negotiation, to serve him. My first advice, therefore, was, that he should produce his deed to the other managing patentee of Drury-lane, and demand immediate entrance to a joint possession of all effects and powers to which that deed had given him an equal title. After which, if he met with no opposition to this demand, (as upon sight of it he did not) that he should be watchful against any contradiction from his colleague, in whatever he might propose, in carrying on the affair; but to let him see that he was determined in all his measures, yet to heighten that resolution, with an ease and temper in his manner, as if he took it for granted there could be no opposition made to whatever he had a mind to; for that this method, added to his natural talent of persuading, would imperceptibly lead his colleague into a reliance on his superior understanding; that, however little he cared for business, he should give himself the air at least of inquiry into what *had* been done, that what he intended to do might be thought more considerable, and be the readier complied with: for if he once suffered his colleague to seem wiser than himself, there would be no end of his perplexing him with absurd and dilatory measures; direct and plain dealing being a quality his natural diffidence would never suffer him to be master of; of which, his not complying with his verbal agreement with Swiny, when the Haymarket house was taken for both their uses, was

an evidence. And though some people thought it depth and policy in him to keep things often in confusion, it was ever my opinion they over-rated his skill; and that, in reality, his parts were too weak for his post, in which he had always acted to the best of his knowledge. That his late colleague, Sir Thomas Skipwith, had trusted too much to his capacity for this sort of business, and was treated by him accordingly, without ever receiving any profits from it, for several years: insomuch, that when he found his interest in such desperate hands, he thought the best thing he could do with it was, (as he saw) to give it away. Therefore, if he (Mr. Brett) could once fix himself, as I had advised, upon a different foot with this hitherto untractable manager, the business would soon run through whatever channel he might have a mind to lead it. And though, I allowed, the greatest difficulty he would meet with would be in getting his consent to a union of the two companies, which was the only scheme that could raise the patent to its former value, and which, I knew, this close manager would secretly lay all possible rubs in the way to; yet, it was visible, there was a way of reducing him to compliance: for though it was true his caution would never part with a straw, by way of concession, yet to a high hand he would give up any thing, provided he were suffered to keep his title to it: if his hat were taken from his head, in the street, he would make no farther resistance, than to say, "I am not willing to part with it:" much less would he have the resolution, openly, to oppose any just measures, when he should find one who, with an equal right to his, and with a known interest to bring them about, was resolved to go through with them.

Now, though I knew my friend was as thoroughly acquainted with this patentee's temper as myself, yet I thought it not amiss to quicken and support his resolution, by confirming to him the little trouble he would

meet with in pursuit of the union I had advised him to; for it must be known that, on our side, trouble was a sort of physic we did not much care to take: but as the fatigue of this affair was likely to be lowered by a good deal of entertainment and humour, which would naturally engage him in his dealing with so exotic a partner, I knew that this softening the business into a diversion, would lessen every difficulty that lay in our way to it.

However copiously I may have indulged myself in this commemoration of a gentleman with whom I had passed so many of my younger days with pleasure, yet the reader may by this insight into his character, and by that of the other patentee, be better able to judge of the secret springs that gave motion to, or obstructed, so considerable an event as that of the re-union of the two companies of actors in 1708. In histories of more weight, for want of such particulars, we are often deceived in the true causes of facts that most concern us to be let into; which sometimes makes us ascribe to policy, or false appearances of wisdom, what, perhaps, in reality, was the mere effect of chance or humour.

Immediately after Mr. Brett was admitted as a joint-patentee, he made use of the intimacy he had with the Vice Chamberlain, to assist his scheme of this intended union, in which he so far prevailed, that it was soon after left to the particular care of the same Vice Chamberlain, to give him all the aid and power necessary to the bringing what he desired to perfection. The scheme was to have but one theatre for plays, and another for operas, under separate interests. And this the generality of spectators, as well as the most approved actors, had been some time calling for, as the only expedient to recover the credit of the stage, and the valuable interests of its managers.

As the condition of the comedians at this time is taken notice of in my dedication of the "Wife's Resentment" to

the Marquis (now Duke) of Kent, and then Lord Chamberlain, which was published above thirty years ago, when I had no thought of ever troubling the world with this theatrical history, I see no reason why it may not pass as a voucher of the facts I am now speaking of: I shall therefore give them in the very light I then saw them. After some acknowledgment for his lordship's protection of our (Haymarket) theatre, it is further said:

“The stage has, for many years, till of late groaned under the greatest discouragements, which have been very much, if not wholly, owing to the mismanagement of those that have awkwardly governed it. Great sums have been ventured upon empty projects, and hopes of immoderate gains; and when those hopes have failed, the loss has been tyrannically deducted out of the actors' salary. And if your lordship had not redeemed them (this is meant of our being suffered to come over to Swiny) they were very near being wholly laid aside, or, at least, the use of their labour was to be swallowed up, in the pretended merit of singing and dancing.”

What follows, relates to the difficulties in dealing with the, then, impracticable manager; *viz.*

“— And though your lordship's tenderness of oppressing is so very just, that you have rather staid to convince a man of your good intentions to him, than to do him even a service against his will; yet since your lordship has so happily begun the establishment of the separate diversions, we live in hope that the same justice and resolution will still persuade you to go as successfully through with it. But while any man is suffered to confound the industry and use of them, by acting publicly, in opposition to your lordship's equal intentions, under a false and intricate pretence of not being able to comply with them, the town is likely to be more entertained with the private dissensions than the

public performance of either, and the actors in a perpetual fear and necessity of petitioning your lordship every season for new relief."

Such was the state of the stage, immediately preceding the time of Mr. Brett's being admitted a joint-patentee, who, as he saw, with clearer eyes, what was its evident interest, left no proper measures unattempted to make this so long despaired-of union practicable. The most apparent difficulty to be got over in this affair was what could be done for Swiny, in consideration of his being obliged to give up those actors, whom the power and choice of the Lord Chamberlain had, the year before, set him at the head of, and by whose management those actors had found themselves in a prosperous condition. But an accident, at this time, happily contributed to make that matter easy. The inclination of our people of quality for foreign operas had now reached the ears of Italy, and the credit of their taste had drawn over from thence, without any more particular invitation, one of their capital singers, the famous Signior Cavaliero Nicolini, from whose arrival, and the impatience of the town to hear him, it was concluded that operas, being now so completely provided, could not fail of success; and that, by making Swiny sole director of them, the profits must be an ample compensation for his resignation of the actors. This matter being thus adjusted, by Swiny's acceptance of the opera only to be performed at the Haymarket house, the actors were all ordered to return to Drury-lane, there to remain (under the patentees) her majesty's only company of comedians.



## CHAP. XII.

*A short view of the opera, when first divided from the comedy.—Plays recover their credit.—The old patentee uneasy at their success.—Why.—The occasion of Colonel Brett's throwing up his share in the patent.—The consequences of it.—Anecdotes of Goodman the actor.—The rate of favourite actors in his time.—The patentees, by endeavouring to reduce their price, lose them all a second time.—The principal comedians return to the Haymarket in shares with Swiny.—They alter that theatre.—The original and present form of the theatre in Drury-lane compared.—Operas fall off.—The occasion of it.—Farther observations upon them.—The patentee dispossessed of Drury-lane theatre.—Mr. Collier, with a new license, heads the remains of that company.*

PLAYS and operas being thus established upon separate interests, they were now left to make the best of their way into favour, by their different merit. Although the opera is not a plant of our native growth, nor what our plainer appetites are fond of, and is of so delicate a nature that, without excessive charge, it cannot live long among us, especially while the nicest connoisseurs in music fall into such various heresies in taste, every sect pretending to be the true one; yet, as it is called a theatrical entertainment, and by its alliance or neutrality has more or less affected our domestic theatre, a short view of its progress may be allowed a place in our history.

After this new regulation, the first opera that appeared, was "Pyrrhus." Subscriptions, at that time, were not

extended, as of late, to the whole season, but were limited to the first six days only of a new opera. The chief performers in this were Nicolini, Valentini, and Mrs. Tofts;\* and, for the inferior parts, the best that were then to be found. Whatever praises may have been given to the most famous voices that have been heard since Nicolini, upon the whole, I cannot but come into the opinion that still prevails among several persons of condition, who are able to give a reason for their liking, that no singer since his time, has so justly and gracefully acquitted himself, in whatever character he appeared, as Nicolini.† At most,

\* This lady sang in English, while her associates responded in Italian. Such was the delicacy of our national taste.

† Signor Nicolini Grimaldi is thus described in the "Tattler," No. 115, from which I extract the passage, given also, overleaf, by Cibber, on account of the complete notice that it furnishes of this eminent performer.

"I went on Friday last to the Opera, and was surprized to find a thin house at so noble an entertainment, till I heard that the tumbler was not to make his appearance that night. For my own part, I was fully satisfied with the sight of an actor; who, by the grace and propriety of his action and gesture, does honour to an human figure, as much as the other vilifies and degrades it. Every one will easily imagine I mean Signior Nicolini, who sets off the character he bears in an opera by his action, as much as he does the words of it by his voice. Every limb, and every finger, contributes to the part he acts, insomuch that a deaf man might go along with him in the sense of it. There is scarcely a beautiful posture in an old statue which he does not plant himself in, as the different circumstances of the story give occasion for it. He performs the most ordinary action in a manner suitable to the greatness of his character, and shows the prince even in the giving of a letter, or dispatching a message. Our best actors are somewhat at a loss to support themselves with proper gesture, as they move from any considerable distance to the front of the stage; but I have seen the

the difference between him and the greatest favourite of the ladies, Farinelli, amounted but to this—that he might sometimes more exquisitely surprise us, but Nicolini (by pleasing the eye as well as the ear) filled us with a more various and *rational* delight. Whether, in this excellence, he has since had any competitor, perhaps will be better judged, by what the critical censor of Great Britain says of him, in his 115th “Tattler;” *viz.*

Nicolini sets off the character he bears in an opera, by his action, as much as he does the words of it, by his voice; every limb, and finger, contributes to the part he acts, insomuch, that a deaf man might go along with him in the sense of it. There is scarcely a beautiful posture in an old statue, which he does not plant himself in, as the different circumstances of the story give occasion for it. He performs the most ordinary action, in a manner suitable to the greatness of his character, and shows the prince, even in the giving of a letter, or dispatching of a message, &c.

His voice, at this first time of being among us, (for he made us a second visit when it was impaired) had all that strong, clear sweetness of tone so lately admired in Sencino. A blind man could scarcely have distinguished them; but in volubility of throat, the former had much the superiority. This so excellent performer’s agreement was eight hundred guineas for the year, which is but an eighth part more than half the sum that has since been given to several that could never totally surpass him. The consequence of which is, that the losses by operas, for several seasons, to the end of the year 1738, have been so great, that those gentlemen of quality who last undertook the direction of them, found it ridiculous any longer to enter-

person of whom I am now speaking, enter alone at the remotest part of it, and advance from it with such greatness of air and mien, as seemed to fill the stage, and at the same time commanded the attention of the audience with the majesty of his appearance.”—*Monday, Jan. 2, 1710.*

tain the public at so extravagant an expense, while no one particular person thought himself obliged by it.

Mrs. Tofts, who took her first grounds of music here in her own country, before the Italian taste had so highly prevailed; was then not\* an adept in it: yet whatever defect the fashionably skilful might find in her manner, she had, in the general sense of her spectators, charms that few of the most learned singers ever arrive at. The beauty of her fine-proportioned figure, and exquisitely sweet silver tone of her voice, with that peculiar rapid swiftness of her throat, were perfections not to be imitated by art or labour. Valentini I have already mentioned, therefore need only say farther of him, that though he was every way inferior to Nicolini, yet as he had the advantage of giving us our first impression of a good opera-singer, he had still his admirers, and was of great service, in being so skilful a second to his superior.

Three such excellent performers, in the same kind of entertainment at once, England till this time had never seen. Without any farther comparison, then, with the much dearer bought who have succeeded them, their novelty, at least, was a charm that drew vast audiences of the fine world after them. Swiny, their sole director, was prosperous, and in one winter a gainer by them of a moderate younger brother's fortune. But as music, by so profuse a dispensation of her beauties, could not always supply our dainty appetites with equal variety, nor for ever please us with the same objects, the opera, after one luxurious season, like the fine wife of a roving husband, began to lose

\* —not an adept in it.]—In his quarto edition of this work, Mr. Cibber wrote—"but an adept," making the word, *adept*, imply a *novice*, instead of a *proficient*. His old inveterate enemy Fielding, in the "Champion," seized upon this blunder, and very forcibly urged it as a proof of ignorance.

its charms, and every day discovered to our satiety, imperfections which our former fondness had been blind to. But of this I shall observe more in its place : in the meantime, let us inquire, into the productions of our native theatre.

It may easily be conceived that, by this entire re-union of the two companies, plays must generally have been performed to a more than usual advantage and exactness ; for now every chief actor, according to his particular capacity, piqued himself upon rectifying those errors which, during their divided state, were almost unavoidable. Such a choice of actors added a richness to every good play, as it was then served up to the public entertainment. The common people crowded to them, with a more joyous expectation, and those of the higher taste, returned to them, as to old acquaintances, with new desires, after a long absence. In a word, all parties seemed better pleased, but he who, one might imagine, had most reason to be so, the (lately) sole managing patentec. He, indeed, saw his power daily mouldering from his own hands, into those of Mr. Brett, whose gentlemanly manner of making every one's business easy to him, threw their old master under a disregard which he had not been used to, nor could, with all his happy change of affairs, support. Although this grave theatrical minister, of whom I have been obliged to make such frequent mention, had acquired the reputation of a most profound politician, by being often incomprehensible, yet I am not sure that his conduct, at this juncture, gave us not an evident proof that he was, like other frail mortals, more a slave to his passions than his interest ; for no creature ever seemed more fond of power, that so little knew how to use it to his profit and reputation ; otherwise, he could not possibly have been so discontented, in his secure and prosperous state of the theatre, as to resolve, at all hazards, to

destroy it. We shall now see what infallible measures he took to bring this laudable scheme to perfection:

He plainly saw that, as this disagreeable prosperity was chiefly owing to the conduct of Mr. Brett, there could be no hope of recovering the stage to its former confusion, but by finding some effectual means to make Mr. Brett weary of his charge. The most probable he could, for the present, think of, in this distress, was to call in the adventurers (whom for many years, by his defence in law, he had kept out) now to take care of their visibly improving interests. This fair appearance of equity, being known to be his own proposal, he rightly guessed would incline these adventurers to form a majority of votes on his side, in all theatrical questions; and consequently become a check upon the power of Mr. Brett, who had so visibly alienated the hearts of his theatrical subjects, and now began to govern without him. When the adventurers, therefore, were readmitted to their old government, after having recommended himself to them, by proposing to make some small dividend of the profits, (though he did not design that jest should be repeated) he took care that the creditors of the patent, who were then no inconsiderable body, should carry off the every week's clear profits, in proportion to their several dues and demands. This conduct, so speciously just, he had hopes would let Mr. Brett see that his share in the patent was not so valuable an acquisition as, perhaps, he might think it; and probably make a man of his turn to pleasure, soon weary of the little profit and great plague it gave him.

Now, though these might be all notable expedients, yet I cannot say they would have wholly contributed to Mr. Brett's quitting his post, had not a matter of much stronger moment, an unexpected dispute between him and Sir Thomas Skipwith, prevailed with him to lay it down:

for, in the midst of this flourishing state of the patent, Mr. Brett was surprised with a subpoena into Chancery; from Sir Thomas Skipwith, who alleged, in his bill, that the conveyance he had made of his interest in the patent to Mr. Brett, was only intended in trust. Whatever the intent might be, the deed itself, which I then read, made no mention of any trust whatever. But whether Mr. Brett, as Sir Thomas farther asserted, had previously, or after the deed was signed, given his word of honour that, if he should ever make the stage turn to any account or profit, he would certainly restore it, that indeed I can say nothing to; but be the deed valid or void, the facts that apparently followed were that, though Mr. Brett, in his answer to this bill, absolutely denied his receiving this assignment, either in trust, or upon any limited condition, of what kind soever, yet he made no farther defence in the cause. But since he found Sir Thomas had thought fit, on any account, to sue for the restitution of it; and Mr. Brett being himself conscious that, as the world knew, he had paid no consideration for it, his keeping it might be misconstrued, or not favourably spoken of; or perhaps finding, though the profits were great, they were constantly swallowed up (as has been observed) by the previous satisfaction of old debts, he grew so tired of the plague and trouble the whole affair had given him, and was likely still to engage him in, that, in a few weeks after, he withdrew himself from all concern with the theatre, and quietly left Sir Thomas to find his better account in it. And thus stood his undecided right, till, upon the demise of Sir Thomas, Mr. Brett, being allowed the charges he had been at, in this attendance and prosecution of the union, reconveyed this share of the patent to Sir George Skipwith, the son and heir of Sir Thomas.

Our politician, the old patentee, having thus fortunately got rid of Mr. Brett, who had so rashly brought the patent

once more to be a profitable tenure, was now again at liberty to chuse rather to lose all than not to have it all to himself.

I have elsewhere observed that nothing can so effectually secure the strength, or contribute to the prosperity of a good company, as the directors of it having always, as near as possible, an amicable understanding with three or four of their best actors, whose good or ill will must naturally make a wide difference in their profitable or useless manner of serving them. While the principal are kept reasonably easy, the lower class can never be troublesome, without hurting themselves; but when a valuable actor is hardly treated, the master must be a very cunning man that finds his account in it. We shall now see how far experience will verify this observation.

The patentees thinking themselves secure, in being restored to their former absolute power over this now only company, chose rather to govern it by the reverse of the method I have recommended: for though the daily charge of their united company amounted not, by a good deal, to what either of the two companies now in Drury-lane or Covent-garden, singly, arises [to]; they, notwithstanding, fell into their former politics, of thinking every shilling taken from a hired actor so much clear gain to the proprietor: many of their people, therefore, were actually, if not injudiciously, reduced in their pay, and others given to understand the same fate was designed them; of which last number I myself was one; which occurs to my memory by the answer I made to one of the adventurers, who, in justification of their intended proceeding, told me, that my salary, though it should be less than it was by ten shillings a-week, would still be more than ever Goodman had, who was a better actor than I could pretend to be. To which I replied, "This may be true; but then you know, sir, it is



as true, that Goodman was forced to go upon the highway for a livelihood." As this was a known fact of Goodman, my mentioning it on that occasion, I believe, was of service to me; at least my salary was not reduced after it. To say a word or two more of Goodman, so celebrated an actor in his time, perhaps may set the conduct of the patentees in a clearer light. Though Goodman had left the stage before I came to it, I had some slight acquaintance with him. About the time of his being expected to be an evidence against Sir John Fenwick, in the assassination plot, in 1696,\* I happened to meet him at dinner at Sir Thomas Skipwith's, who, as he was an agreeable companion himself, liked Goodman for the same quality. Here it was, that Goodman, without disguise, or sparing himself, fell into a laughing account of several loose passages of his younger life; as his being expelled the university of Cambridge, for being one of the hot-headed sparks who were concerned in the cutting and defacing the Duke of Monmouth's picture, then chancellor of that place. But this disgrace, it seems, had not disqualified him for the stage; which, like the sea-service, refuses no man for his morals, that is able-bodied. There, as an actor, he soon grew into a different reputation; but whatever his merit might be, the pay of a hired hero, in those days, was so very low, that he was forced, it seems, to take the air, (as he called it) and borrow what money the first man he met had about him. But this being his first exploit of that kind, which the scantiness of his theatrical fortune had reduced him to, King James was prevailed upon to pardon him; which, Goodman said, was doing him so particular an honour, that

\* It is a strange circumstance that Goodman should be suffered to pollute the presence of any honest man, at this juncture, while labouring under the charges of treason and projected murder.

no man could wonder if his acknowledgment had carried him a little farther than ordinary, into the interest of that prince. But as he had, lately, been out of luck, in backing his old master, he had now no way to get home the life he was out, upon his account, but by being under the same obligations to King William.

Another anecdote of him, though not quite so dishonourably enterprising, which I had from his own mouth, at a different time, will equally show to what low shifts in life the poor provision for good actors, under the early government of the patent, reduced them. In the younger days of their heroism, Captain Griffin and Goodman were confined by their moderate salaries, to the economy of lying together in the same bed, and having but one shirt between them. One of them being under the obligation of a rendezvous with a fair lady, insisted upon his wearing it out of his turn, which occasioned so high a dispute, that the combat was immediately demanded, and accordingly their pretensions to it were decided by a fair tilt upon the spot, in the room where they lay. But whether *Clytus* or *Alexander* was obliged to see no company till a worse could be washed for him, seems not to be a material point in their history, or to my purpose.

By this rate of Goodman, who, till the time of his quitting the stage, never had more than what is called forty shillings a-week, it may be judged how cheap the labour of actors had been formerly ; and the patentees thought it a folly to continue the higher price, (which their divisions had since raised them to) now there was but one market for them ; but, alas, they had forgotten their former fatal mistake of squabbling with their actors, in 1695, nor did they make any allowance for the changes and operations of time, or enough consider the interest the actors had in the Lord Chamberlain, on whose protection

they might always rely, and whose decrees had been less restrained by precedent than those of a Lord Chancellor.

In this mistaken view of their interest, the patentees, by treating their actors as enemies, really made them so. And when once the masters of a hired company think not their actors' hearts as necessary as their hands, they cannot be said to have agreed for above half the work they are able to do in a day. Or, if an unexpected success should, notwithstanding, make the profits, in any gross disproportion, greater than the wages, the wages will always have something worse than a murmur at the head of them, that will not only measure the merit of the actor by the gains of the proprietor, but will never naturally be quiet, till every scheme of getting into property has been tried, to make the servant his own master; and this, as far as experience can make me judge, will always be, in either of these cases, the state of our English theatre. What truth there may be in this observation, we are now coming to a proof of.

To enumerate all the particular acts of power in which the patentees daily bore hard upon this now only company of actors, might be as tedious as unnecessary; I shall, therefore, come at once to their most material grievance, upon which they grounded their complaint to the Lord Chamberlain, who, in the year following, 1709, took effectual measures for their relief.

The patentees, observing that the benefit-plays of the actors, towards the latter end of the season, brought the most crowded audiences in the year, began to think their own interests too much neglected by these partial favours of the town to their actors, and therefore judged it would not be impolitic, in such wholesome annual profits, to have a fellow-feeling with them. Accordingly, an *indulto* was laid of one-third, out of the profits of every benefit, for the

proper use and behoof of the patent.\* But that a clear judgment may be formed of the equity, or hardship of this imposition, it will be necessary to show from whence, and from what causes, the actors' claim to benefits originally proceeded.

During the reign of King Charles, an actor's benefit had never been heard of. The first indulgence of this kind was given to Mrs. Barry,† (as has been formerly observed) in King James's time, in consideration of the extraordinary applause that had followed her performance : but there this favour rested, to her alone, till after the division of the only company in 1695, at which time the patentees were soon reduced to pay their actors, half in good words, and half in ready money. In this precarious condition, some particular actors (however binding their agreements might be) were too poor, or too wise to go to law with a lawyer ; and therefore rather chose to compound their arrears, for their being admitted to the chance of having them made up by

\* " After Mr. Rich was again restored to the management of the playhouse, he made an order to stop a certain proportion of the clear profits of every benefit-play, without exception ; which being done, and reaching the chief players as well as the underlings, zealous application was made to the Lord Chamberlain, to oblige Mr. Rich to return the money stopped to each particular. The dispute lasted some time, and Mr. Rich, not giving full satisfaction upon that head, was silenced ; during the time of which silence, the chief players \* \* \* \* \* set up for themselves, and got into the possession of the playhouse in Drury-lane."—Answer to Steele's " State of the Case ;" 1720.

Rich, in this business made out his right before the Attorney-general, and other lawyers, and then petitioned the council, who, refusing to determine the matter, referred him to law, and there matters rested till he built a new house in Lincoln's-inn-fields.

† This mistake is corrected in a former note.

the profits of a benefit-play. This expedient had this consequence ; that the patentees, though their daily audiences might, and did sometimes, mend, still kept the short subsistence of their actors at a stand, and grew more steady in their resolution so to keep them, as they found them less apt to mutiny while their hopes of being cleared off by a benefit were depending. In a year or two, these benefits grew so advantageous, that they became, at last, the chief article in every actor's agreement.

Now, though the agreements of these united actors I am speaking of in 1708, were as yet only verbal, yet that made no difference in the honest obligation to keep them. But, as honour at that time happened to have but a loose hold of their consciences, the patentees rather chose to give it the slip, and went on with their work without it. No actor, therefore, could have his benefit fixed, till he had first signed a paper, signifying his voluntary acceptance of it upon the above conditions, any claims from custom to the contrary, notwithstanding. Several at first refused to sign this paper ; upon which the first in rank were offered on the same conditions, to come before the refusers ; this smart expedient got some few of the fearful the preference to their seniors ; who, at last, seeing the time was too short for a present remedy, and that they must either come into the boat, or lose their tide, were forced to comply with what they as yet silently resented as the severest injury. In this situation, therefore, they chose to let the principal benefits be over, that their grievances might swell into some bulk, before they made any application for redress to the Lord Chamberlain ; who, upon hearing their general complaint, ordered the patentees to show cause why their benefits had been diminished one third, contrary to the common usage. The patentees pleaded the signed agreement, and the actors' receipts of the other two

thirds, in full satisfaction ; but these were proved to have been exacted from them by the methods already mentioned. They, notwithstanding, insisted upon them as lawful. But as law and equity do not always agree, they were looked upon as unjust and arbitrary ; whereupon the patentees were warned at their peril to refuse the actors full satisfaction. But here it was thought necessary that judgment should be for some time respite<sup>d</sup>, till the actors, who had leave so to do, could form a body strong enough to make the inclination of the Lord Chamberlain to relieve them practicable.

Accordingly, Swiny (who was then sole director of the opera only) had permission to enter into a private treaty with such of the united actors in Drury-lane as might be thought fit to head a company under their own management, and to be sharers with him in the Haymarket. The actors chosen for this charge were Wilks, Dogget, Mrs. Oldfield, and myself. But, before I proceed, lest it should seem surprising that neither Betterton, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Bracegirdle, or Booth, were parties in this treaty, it must be observed, that Betterton was now seventy-three, and rather chose, with the infirmities of age upon him, to rely on such salary as might be appointed him, than to involve himself in the cares and hurry that must unavoidably attend the regulation of a new company. As to the two celebrated actresses I have named, this has been my most proper occasion of making it known, that they had both quitted the stage the year before this transaction was thought of ; and Booth-as yet was scarcely out of his minority as an actor, or only in the promise of that reputation, which, in about four or five years after, he happily arrived at. However, at this juncture he was not so far overlooked, as not to be offered a valuable addition to his salary ; but this he declined, being, while the patentees were under this distress,

of a heart injuriously treated, and now relieved by that instant occasion, why might they not be pardoned ?

The authority of the patent now no longer subsisting, all the confederated actors immediately walked out of the house, to which they never returned, till they became themselves the tenants and masters of it.

Here, again, we see an higher instance of the authority of a Lord Chamberlain, than any of those I have elsewhere mentioned : from whence that power might be derived, as I have already said, I am not lawyer enough to know ; however, it is evident that a lawyer obeyed it, though to his cost ; which might incline one to think that the law was not clearly against it : be that as it may, since the law has lately made it no longer a question, let us drop the inquiry, and proceed to the facts which followed this order, that silenced the patent.

From this last injudicious disagreement of the patentees with their principal actors, and from what they had suffered on the same occasion, in the division of their only company in 1695, might we not imagine there was something of infatuation in their management ? For though I allow actors, in general, when they are too much indulged, or governed by an unsteady head, to be as unruly a multitude as power can be plagued with ; yet there is a medium, which, if cautiously observed by a candid use of power, making them always know, without feeling, their superior, neither suffering their encroachments, nor invading their rights, with an immovable adherence to the accepted laws they are to walk by ; such a regulation, I say, has never failed, in my observation, to have made them a tractable and profitable society. If the government of a well-established theatre were to be compared to that of a nation, there is no one act of policy or misconduct in the one or the other, in which the manager might not, in some parallel

case (laugh, if you please) be equally applauded, or condemned with the statesman. Perhaps this will not be found so wild a conceit, if you look into the 193d "Tatler," vol. 4., where the affairs of the state, and those of the very stage I am now treating of, are, in a letter from Downs the prompter, compared, and, with a great deal of wit and humour, set upon an equal foot of policy.\* The

\* "Honoured Sir:

*July 1, 1710.*

Finding by divers of your late papers, that you are a friend to the profession of which I was many years an unworthy member, I the rather make bold to crave your advice touching a proposal that has been lately made me of coming again into business, and the sub-administration of stage affairs. I have, from my youth, been bred up behind the curtain, and been a prompter from the time of the restoration. I have seen many changes, as well of scenes as of actors, and have known men within my remembrance arrive to the highest dignities of the theatre, who made their entrance in the quality of mutes, joint-stools, flower-pots, and tapestry hangings. It cannot be unknown to the nobility and gentry, that a gentleman of the inns of court, and a deep intriguer, had some time since worked himself into the sole management and direction of the theatre. Nor is it less notorious, that his restless ambition, and subtle machinations, did manifestly tend to the extirpation of the good old British actors, and the introduction of foreign pretenders; such as Harlequins, French dancers, and Roman singers; which, though they impoverished the proprietors, and imposed on the audience, were for some time tolerated, by reason of his dexterous insinuations, which prevailed upon a few deluded women, especially the vizard masks, to believe that the stage was in danger. But his schemes were soon exposed, and the great ones that supported him withdrawing their favour, he made his exit, and remained for a season in obscurity. During this retreat the Machiavelian was not idle, but secretly fomented divisions and wrought over to his side some of the inferior actors, re-



letter is supposed to have been written on the last change of the ministry in Queen Ann's time. I will therefore venture,

serving a trap-door to himself, to which only he had a key. This entrance secured, this cunning person, to complete his company, bethought himself of calling in the most eminent strollers from all parts of the kingdom. I have seen them all ranged together behind the scenes; but they are many of them persons that never trod the stage before, and so very awkward and ungainly, that it is impossible to believe the audience will bear them. He was looking over his catalogue of plays, and indeed picked up a good tolerable set of grave faces for counsellors, to appear in the famous scene of "Venice Preserved," when the danger is over; but they being but mere outsides, and the actors having a great mind to play the "Tempest," there is not a man of them, when he is to perform any thing above dumb show, is capable of acting with a good grace so much as the part of *Trinculo*. However, the master persists in his design, and is fitting up the old "Storm;" but I am afraid he will not be able to procure able sailors or experienced officers for love or money.

Besides all this, when he comes to cast the parts, there is so great a confusion amongst them for want of proper actors, that for my part I am wholly discouraged. The play with which they design to open is, the "Duke and no Duke;" and they are so put to it, that the master himself is to play the *Conjuror*, and they have no one for the *General* but honest George Powel.

Now, sir, they being so much at a loss for the *dramatis personæ*, viz. the persons to enact, and the whole frame of the house being designed to be altered, I desire your opinion, whether you think it advisable for me to undertake to prompt them? For though I can clash swords when they represent a battle, and have yet lungs enough left to huzza their victories, I question, if I should prompt them right, whether they would act accordingly.—I am

Your honour's most humble servant,

JOHN DOWNS.

upon the authority of that author's imagination, to carry the comparison as high as it can possibly go, and say, that as I remember one of our princes, in the last century, to have lost his crown by too arbitrary a use of his power, though he knew how fatal the same measures had been to his unhappy father before him ; why should we wonder, that the same passions, taking possession of men in lower life, by an equally impolitic usage of their theatrical subjects, should have involved the patentees in proportionable calamities.

During the vacation, which immediately followed the silence of the patent, both parties were at leisure to form their schemes for the winter ; for the patentee would still hold out, notwithstanding his being so miserably maimed or over-matched : he had no more regard to blows than a blind cock of the game ; he might be beaten, but would never yield ; the patent was still in his possession, and the broad scal to it visibly as fresh as ever : besides, he had yet some actors in his service, at a much cheaper rate than those who had left him, the salaries of which last now they would not work for him, he was not obliged to pay. In this way of thinking, he still kept together such as had not been invited over to the Haymarket, or had been influenced by Booth to follow his fortune in Drury-lane.

By the patentee's keeping these remains of his broken forces together, it is plain that he imagined this order of silence, like others of the same kind, would be recalled, of course, after a reasonable time of obedience had been

P. S. Sir, since I wrote this, I am credibly informed, that they design a new house in Lincoln's-inn-fields, near the popish chapel, to be ready by Michaelmas next ; which indeed is but repairing an old one that has already failed. You know the honest man who kept the office is gone already."

paid to it:\* but, it seems, he had relied too much upon former precedents; nor had his politics yet dived into the secret, that the court power, with which the patent had been so long and often at variance, had now a mind to take the public diversions more absolutely into their own hands: not that I have any stronger reasons for this conjecture, than that the patent never after this order of silence got leave to play during the queen's reign. But upon the accession of his late majesty, power having then a different aspect, the patent found no difficulty in being permitted to exercise its former authority for acting plays, &c., which, however, from this time of their lying still, in 1709, did not happen till 1714, which the old patentee never lived to see: for he died about six weeks before the new-built theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields was opened, where the first play acted was the "Recruiting Officer," under the management of his heirs and successors. But of that theatre it is not yet time to give any further account.

The first point resolved on by the comedians now re-established in the Haymarket, was to alter the auditory part of their theatre; the inconveniencies of which have been fully enlarged upon in a former chapter. What embarrassed them most in their design was, their want of time to do it in a more complete manner than it now remains in, otherwise they had brought it to the original model of that in Drury-lane, only in a larger proportion, as the wider walls of it would require. As there are not many spectators

\* So confident was Rich of this result, that he applied himself, immediately upon his expulsion from Drury-lane theatre, to the building of his new house in Lincoln's-inn-fields. There is a hint of this purpose in the postscript to Downs's letter, already quoted, in which the "~~new~~ house" is designed to be ready in the autumn of 1710

who may remember what form the Drury-lane theatre stood in about forty years ago, before the old patentee, to make it hold more money, took it in his head to alter it, it were but justice to lay the original figure which Sir Christopher Wren first gave it, and the alterations of it, now standing, in a fair light; that equal spectators may see, if they were at their choice, which of the structures would incline them to a preference. But in this appeal, I only speak to such spectators as allow a good play, well acted, to be the most valuable entertainment of the stage. Whether such plays (leaving the skill of the dead or living actors equally out of the question) have been more or less recommended to their presentation, by either of these different forms of that theatre, is our present matter of inquiry.

It must be observed, then, that the area, or platform, of the old stage projected about four feet forwarder, in a semi-oval figure, parallel to the benches of the pit; and that the former lower doors of entrance for the actors were brought down between the two foremost (and then only) pilasters; in the place of which doors, now the two stage-boxes are fixed. That where the doors of entrance now are, there formerly stood two additional side-wings, in front to a full set of scenes, which had then almost a double effect in their loftiness and magnificence.

By this original form, the usual station of the actors, in almost every scene, was advanced at least ten feet nearer to the audience than they now can be; because, not only from the stage's being shortened, in front, but likewise from the additional interposition of those stage-boxes, the actors (in respect to the spectators that fill them) are kept so much more backward from the main audience than they used to be: but when the actors were in possession of that forwarder space, to advance upon, the voice was then more in the centre of the house, so that the most distant

ear had scarce the least doubt or difficulty in hearing what fell from the weakest utterance: all objects were thus drawn nearer to the sense; every painted scene was stronger; every grand scene and dance more extended; every rich, or fine-coloured habit had a more lively lustre; nor was the minutest motion of a feature (properly changing with the passion or humour it suited) ever lost, as they frequently must be, in the obscurity of too great a distance: and how valuable an advantage the facility of hearing distinctly is to every well-acted scene, every common spectator is a judge. A voice scarcely raised above the tone of a whisper, either in tenderness, resignation, innocent distress, or jealousy suppressed, often has as much concern with the heart, as the most clamorous passions; and when, on any of these occasions, such affecting speeches are plainly heard or lost, how wide is the difference from the great or little satisfaction received from them? To all this, a master of a company may say, I now receive ten pounds more, than could have been taken formerly, in every full house. Not unlikely. But might not his house be oftener full, if the auditors were oftener pleased? Might not every bad house, too, by a possibility of being made every day better, add as much to one side of his account, as it could take from the other? If what I have said carries any truth in it, why might not the original form of this theatre be restored? But let this digression avail what it may, the actors now returned to the Haymarket, as I have observed, wanting nothing but length of time, to have governed their alteration of that theatre by this original model of Drury-lane, which I have recommended. As their time, therefore, was short, they made their best use of it; they did something to it: they contracted its wideness by three ranges of boxes on each side, and brought down its enormous high ceiling within so proportionable a

compass, that it effectually cured those hollow undulations of the voice formerly complained of. The remedy had its effect : their audiences exceeded their expectation. There was now no other theatre open against them ; they had the town to themselves ; they were their own masters, and the profits of their industry came into their own pockets.

Yet with all this fair weather, the season of their uninterrupted prosperity was not yet arrived ; for the great expense, and thinner audiences of the opera, (of which they then were equally directors) was a constant drawback upon their gains, yet not so far, but that their income this year was better than in their late station at Drury-lane. But by the short experience we had then had of operas ; by the high reputation they seemed to have been arrived at the year before ; by their power of drawing the whole body of nobility, as by enchantment, to their solemnities ; by that prodigality of expense at which they were so willing to support them ; and from the late extraordinary profits Swiny had made of them ; what mountains did we not hope from this mole-hill ? But, alas the fairy vision was vanished, this bridal beauty was grown familiar to the general taste, and satiety began to make excuses for its want of appetite : or, what is still stranger, its late admirers now as much valued their judgment, in being able to find out the faults of the performers, as they had before, in discovering their excellencies. The truth is, that this kind of entertainment being so entirely sensual, it had no possibility of getting the better of our reason, but by its novelty ; and that novelty could never be supported but by an annual change of the best voices, which, like the finest flowers, bloom but for a season, and when that is over, are only dead nosegays. From this natural cause, we have seen, within these two years, even Farinelli singing to an audience of five-and-thirty pounds ; and yet, if common

fume may be credited, the same voice, so neglected in one country, has in another had charms sufficient to make that crown sit easy on the head of a monarch, which the jealousy of politicians (who had their views in his keeping it) feared without some such extraordinary amusement, his satiety of empire might tempt him a second time to resign.\*

There is, too, in the very species of an Italian singer, such an innate, fantastical pride and caprice, that the government of them (here at least) is almost impracticable. This distemper, as we were not sufficiently warned or apprised of, threw our musical affairs into perplexities, we knew not easily how to get out of. There is scarcely a sensible auditor in the kingdom that has not since that time, had occasion to laugh at the several instances of it. But what is still more ridiculous, these costly Canary birds have sometimes infested the whole body of our dignified lovers of music with the same childish animosities. Ladies have been known to decline their visits, upon account of their being of a different musical party. Cæsar and Pompey made not a warmer division in the Roman republic, than those heroines, their countrywomen, the Faustina and Cuzzoni blew up in our commonwealth of academical music, by their implacable pretensions to superiority. And while this greatness of soul is their unalterable virtue, it will never be practicable to make two capital singers of the same sex do as they should do in one

\* The monarch alluded to, I suppose, was Victor Amadeus, King of Sardinia. Carlo Broschi, better known by the name of Farinelli, was born in the dukedom of Modena, in 1705, and suffered emasculation, from an accident, when young. The Spanish king Ferdinand created him a knight of Calatrava, honoured him with his friendship, and added to his fortune. He returned to Italy on his patron's death, and died in 1782.

opera, at the same time ! No, not though England were to double the sums it has already thrown ~~after them~~ for, even in their own country, where an extraordinary occasion has called a greater number of their best to sing together, the mischief they have made has been proportionable ; an instance of which, if I am rightly informed, happened at Parma, where, upon the celebration of the marriage of that duke, a collection was made of the most eminent voices that expense or interest could purchase, to give as complete an opera as the whole vocal power of Italy could form. But when it came to the proof of this musical project, behold, what woful work they made of it ! Every performer would be a Cæsar, or nothing ; their several pretensions to preference were not to be limited within the laws of harmony ; they would all chuse their own songs, but not more to set off themselves, than to oppose or deprive another of an occasion to shine. Yet any one would sing a bad song, provided nobody else had a good one, till, at last, they were thrown together, like so many feathered warriors for a battle royal in a cock-pit, where every one was obliged to kill another, to save himself. What pity it was that these froward misses and masters of music had not been engaged to entertain the court of some King of Morocco, that could have known a good opera from a bad one. With how much ease would such a director have brought them to better order ! But, alas ! as it has been said of greater things,

Suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit.

Imperial Rome fell by the too great strength of its own citizens ; so fell this mighty opera, ruined by the too great excellency of its singers ; for, upon the whole, it proved to be as barbarously bad, as if malice itself had composed it.

Now, though something of this kind, equally provoking,



has generally embarrassed the state of operas, these thirty years; yet it was the misfortune of the managing actors at the Haymarket, to have felt the first effects of it. The honour of the singer and the interest of the undertaker were so often at variance, that the latter began to have but a bad bargain of it. But not to impute more to the caprice of those performers than was really true, there were two different accidents that drew numbers from our audiences, before the season was ended; which were another company permitted to act in Drury-lane, and the long trial of Doctor Sacheverel, in Westminster Hall. By the way, it must be observed that this company was not under the direction of the patent, (which continued still silenced) but was set up by a third interest, with a license from court. The person to whom this new license was granted, was William Collier, Esq., a lawyer of an enterprising head, and a jovial heart; what sort of favour he was in with the people then in power, may be judged from his being often admitted to partake with them those detached hours of life, when business was to give way to pleasure: but this was not all his merit; he was, at the same time, a member of parliament for Truro, in Cornwall, and we cannot suppose a person so qualified, could be refused such a trifle as a license to head a broken company of actors. This sagacious lawyer, then, who had a lawyer to deal with, observing that his antagonist kept possession of a theatre without making use of it, and for which he was not obliged to pay rent, unless he actually *did* use it, wisely conceived it might be the interest of the joint-landlords, since their tenement was in so precarious a condition, to grant a lease to one who had an undisputed authority to be liable, by acting plays in it, to pay the rent of it; especially when he tempted them with an offer of raising it from three to four pounds *per diem*. His project succeeded, the lease was signed; but the means

of getting into possession were to be left to his own cost and discretion. This took him up but little time. He immediately laid siege to it, with a sufficient number of forces, whether lawless or lawful I forget, but they were such as obliged the old governor to give it up; who, notwithstanding, had got intelligence of his approaches and design, time enough to carry off every thing that was worth moving, except a great number of old scenes and new actors that could not easily follow him.

A ludicrous account of this transaction, under fictitious names,\* may be found in the 99th "Tattler," vol. 2., which this explanation may now render more intelligible to the readers of that agreeable author.\*

This other new license being now in possession of the Drury-lane theatre, those actors whom the patentee, ever since the order of silence, had retained in a state of in-

\* "On the 22d instant, a night of public rejoicing, the enemies of Divito made a largess to the people, of faggots, tubs, and other combustible matter, which was erected into a bonfire before the palace. Plentiful cans were at the same time distributed among the dependencies of that principality; and the artful rival of Divito, observing them prepared for enterprise, presented the lawful owner of the neighbouring edifice, and showed his deputation under him. War immediately ensued upon the peaceful empire of wit and the muses; the Goths and Vandals sacking Rome did not threaten a more barbarous devastation of arts and sciences. But when they had forced their entrance, the experienced Divito had detached all his subjects, and evacuated all his stores. The neighbouring inhabitants report, that the refuse of Divito's followers marched off the night before disguised in magnificence; door-keepers came out clad like cardinals, and scene-drawers like heathen gods. Divito himself was wrapped up in one of his black clouds, and left to the enemy nothing but an empty stage, full of trap-doors, known only to himself and his adherents."

action, all to a man came over to the service of Collier. Of these Booth was then the chief. The merit of the rest had as yet made no considerable appearance, and as the patentee had not left a rag of their clothing behind him, they were but poorly equipped for a public review; consequently, at their first opening, they were very little able to annoy us. But during the trial of Sacheverel, our audiences were extremely weakened, by the better rank of people's daily attending it: while, at the same time, the lower sort, who were not equally admitted to that grand spectacle, as eagerly crowded into Drury-lane, to a new comedy, called the "*Fair Quaker of Deal*." This play, having some low strokes of natural humour in it, was rightly calculated for the capacity of the actors who played it, and to the taste of the multitude, who were now more disposed, and at leisure to see it: but the most happy incident in its fortune was the charm of the *fair Quaker*, which was acted by Miss Santlow, (afterwards Mrs. Booth\*) whose person was then in the full bloom of what beauty she might pretend to: before this, she had only been ad-

\* This lady, originally a dancer, who had previously been kept by the Duke of Marlborough and Mr. Craggs, gave her hand to Booth in the year 1719. It is insinuated by Dennis that when this tragedian was admonished by his friends not to form a connection that would cover him with shame and infamy, he swore, from a feeling it is impossible to analyse, that, though his intended wife was a strumpet, "he liked her the better for it."

Mrs. Booth erected a monument to the memory of her husband, about six months before her death, in Westminster-abbey, and died on the 31st (2) of January, 1773, in the ninety-third year of her age.

(1) "*Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar*."

(2) "*Biographia Dramatica*," says 15th.

mired as the most excellent dancer ; \* which, perhaps, might not a little contribute to the favourable reception she now met with, as an actress, in this character, which so happily suited her figure and capacity. The gentle softness of her voice, the composed innocence of her aspect, the modesty of her dress, the reserved decency of her gesture, and the simplicity of the sentiments that naturally fell from her, made her seem the amiable maid she represented : in a word, not the enthusiastic maid of Orleans was more serviceable of old to the French army, when the English had distressed them, than this *fair quaker* was, at the head of that dramatic attempt, upon which the support of their weak society depended.

But when the trial I have mentioned, and the run of this play were over, the tide of the town beginning to turn again in our favour, Collier was reduced to give his theatrical affairs a different scheme ; which advanced the stage another step towards that settlement, which, in my time, was of the longest duration.

\* “ Far off from these see Santlow, sam’d for dance.”

Gay’s “ Mr. Pope’s welcome from Greece.”

## CHAP. XIII.

*The Patentee, having now no actors, rebuilds the new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields.—A guess at his reasons for it.—More changes in the state of the stage.—The beginning of its better days, under the Triumvirate of Actors.—A sketch of their governing characters.*

AS coarse mothers may have comely children, so anarchy has been the parent of many a good government; and, by a parity of possible consequences, we shall find that from the frequent convulsions of the stage arose, at last, its longest settlement and prosperity; which many of my readers (or, if I should happen to have but few of them, many of my spectators, at least) who, I hope, have not yet lived half their time, will be able to remember.

Though the patent had been often under distresses, it had never felt any blow equal to this unrevoked order of silence; which it is not easy to conceive could have fallen upon any other person's conduct, than that of the old patentee: for if he was conscious of his being under the subjection of that power which had silenced him, why would he incur the danger of suspension, by his so obstinate and impolitic treatment of his actors? If he thought such power over him illegal, how came he to obey it now, more than before, when he slighted a former order, that enjoined him to give his actors their benefits, on their usual conditions? But, to do him justice, the same obstinacy that involved him in these difficulties, at last preserved to his heirs the property of the patent, in its full force and value; yet

to suppose that he foresaw a milder use of power, in some future prince's reign, might be more favourable to him, is begging at best but a cold question. But whether he knew that this broken condition of the patent would not make his troublesome friends, the adventurers, fly from it, as from a falling house, seems not so difficult a question. However, let the reader form his own judgment of them, from the facts that followed. It must, therefore, be observed, that the adventurers seldom came near the house, but when there was some visible appearance of a dividend : but I could never hear that upon an ill run of audiences they had ever returned, or brought in a single shilling to make good the deficiencies of their daily receipts. Therefore, as the patentee in possession had, alone, for several years, supported and stood against this uncertainty of fortune, it may be imagined that his accounts were under so voluminous a perplexity, that few of those adventurers would have leisure or capacity enough to unravel them : and as they had formerly thrown away their time and money at law, in a fruitless inquiry into them, they now seemed to have entirely given up their right and interest : and, according to my best information, notwithstanding the subsequent gains of the patent have been sometimes extraordinary, the farther demands, or claims of right, of the adventurers have lain dormant above these five and twenty years.

Having shown by what means Collier had dispossessed this patentee, not only of the Drury-lane house, but likewise of those few actors which he had kept, for some time, unemployed in it ; we are now led to consider another project of the same patentee, which, if we are to judge of it by the event, has shown him more a wise than a weak man ; which, I confess at the time he put it in execution, seemed not so clear a point : for, notwithstanding he now saw the authority and power of his patent was superseded, or was at

best but precarious, and that he had not one actor left in his service; yet, under all these dilemmas and distresses, he resolved upon rebuilding the new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, of which he had taken a lease, at a low rent, ever since Betterton's company had first left it. This conduct seemed too deep for my comprehension. What are we to think of his taking this lease, in the height of his prosperity, when he could have no occasion for it? Was he a prophet? Could he then foresee he should, one time or other, be turned out of Drury-lane? Or did his mere appetite of architecture urge him to build a house, while he could not be sure he should ever have leave to make use of it? But of all this we may think as we please; whatever was his motive, he, at his own expense, in this interval of his having nothing else to do, rebuilt that theatre from the ground, as it is now standing.\* As for the order of silence, he seemed little concerned at it, while it gave him so much uninterrupted leisure to supervise a work which he naturally took delight in.

After this defeat of the patentee, the theatrical forces of Collier, in Drury-lane, notwithstanding their having drawn the multitude after them, for about three weeks, during the trial of Sacheverel, had made but an indifferent campaign, at the end of the season. Collier, at least, found so little account in it, that it obliged him to push his court-interest (which, wherever the stage was concerned, was not inconsiderable) to support him in another scheme; which was, that in consideration of his giving up the Drury-lane clothes, scenes, and actors, to Swiny, and his joint-sharers, in the Haymarket, he (Collier) might be put into an equal

\* This building, as most persons know, is even "*now standing*," though occupied as a warehouse for crockery.—"To what base uses we may return, Horatio!"

possession of the Haymarket theatre, with all the singers, &c., and be made sole director of the opera. Accordingly, by permission of the Lord Chamberlain, a treaty was entered into, and in a few days ratified by all parties, conformable to the said preliminaries. This was that happy crisis of theatrical liberty which the labouring comedians had long sighed for; and which, for above twenty years following, was so memorably fortunate to them.

However, there were two hard articles in this treaty, which, though it might be policy in the actors to comply with, yet the imposition of them seemed little less despotic than a tax upon the poor, when a government did not want it.

The first of these articles was that, whereas the sole license for acting plays was presumed to be a more profitable authority than that for acting operas only, that, therefore, two hundred pounds a-year should be paid to Collier, while master of the opera, by the comedians; to whom a verbal assurance was given by the plenipoces on the court-side, that, while such payment subsisted, no other company should be permitted to act plays against them, within the liberties, &c. The other article was that, on every Wednesday whereon an opera could be performed, the plays should, *toties quoties*, be silent at Drury-lane, to give the opera a fairer chance for a full house.

This last article, however partial in the intention, was, in its effect, of great advantage to the sharing actors; for, in all public entertainments, a day's abstinence naturally increases the appetite to them: our every Thursday's audience, therefore, was visibly the better, by thus making the day before it a fast. But as this was not a favour designed us, this prohibition of a day, methinks, deserves a little further notice, because it evidently took a sixth part of their income from all the hired actors, who were only paid in



proportion to the number of acting days. This extraordinary regard to operas was, in effect, making the day-labouring actors the principal subscribers to them, and the shutting out people from the play every Wednesday many murmured at, as an abridgment of their usual liberty. And though I was one of those who profited by that order, it ought not to bribe me into a concealment of what was then said and thought of it. I remember a nobleman of the first rank, then in a high post, and not out of court-favour, said openly behind the scenes,—“ It was shameful to take part of the actors’ bread from them to support the silly diversion of people of quality.” But, alas, what was all this grievance, when weighed against the qualifications of so grave and stanch a senator as Collier? Such visible merit, it seems, was to be made easy, though at the expense of the—I had almost said, honour of the court, whose gracious intention for the theatrical commonwealth might have shone with thrice the lustre, if such a paltry price had not been paid for it. But as the government of the stage is but that of the world in miniature, we ought not to have wondered that Collier had interest enough to quarter the weakness of the opera upon the strength of the comedy. General good intentions are not always practicable to a perfection; the most necessary law can hardly pass, but a tenderness to some private interest shall often hang such exceptions upon particular clauses, till at last it comes out lame and lifeless, with the loss of half its force, purpose, and dignity. As for instance, how many fruitless motions have been made in parliaments, to moderate the enormous exactions in the practice of the law? And what sort of justice must that be called, which, when a man has not a mind to pay you a debt of ten pounds, it shall cost you fifty before you can get it? How long, too, has the public been labouring for a bridge at Westminster? But the

wonder, that it was not built a hundred years ago ceases, when we are told that the fear of making one end of London as rich as the other, has been so long an obstruction to it: and though it might seem a still greater wonder, when a new law for building one had at last got over that apprehension, that it should meet with any farther delay, yet experience has shown us that the structure of this useful ornament to our metropolis has been so clogged by private jobs, that were to be picked out of the undertaking, and the progress of the work so disconcerted by a tedious contention of private interests, and endeavours to impose upon the public abominable bargains, that a whole year was lost before a single stone could be laid to its foundation. But posterity will owe its praises to the zeal, and resolution of a truly noble commissioner, whose distinguished impatience has broken through those narrow artifices, those false and frivolous objections, that delayed it, and has already began to raise, above the tide, that future monument of his public spirit.

How far all this may be allowed applicable to the state of the stage is not of so great importance, nor so much my concern, as that what is observed upon it should always remain a memorable truth to the honour of that nobleman. But now I go on. Collier, being thus possessed of his musical government, thought his best way would be to farm it out to a gentleman, Aaron Hill, Esq.,\* (who, he

\* This gentleman, whose ardour for the interest of the stage should endear his memory to all by whom its value is still maintained, bore a conspicuous part in the theatrical transactions of his time, from the period of his admission to the management of Drury-lane theatre, till about ten years before his death, in the year 1749. He was almost the only critic of his age who laboured assiduously to understand the art of acting, and who took incessant

had reason to suppose, knew something more of theatrical matters\* than himself) at a rent, if I mistake not, of six hundred pounds *per annum*: but before the season was ended (upon what occasion, if I could remember, it might not be material to say) took it into his hands again. But all his skill and interest could not raise the direction of the opera to so good a post as he thought due to a person of his consideration: he, therefore, the year following, entered upon another high-handed scheme, which, till the demise of the queen, turned to his better account.

After the comedians were in possession of Drury-lane, from whence, during my time upon the stage, they never departed, their swarm of audiences exceeded all that had been seen in thirty years before; which, however, I do not impute so much to the excellence of their acting, as to their indefatigable industry, and good management; for, as I have often said, I never thought, in the general, that we stood in any place of comparison with the eminent

pains to communicate the knowledge he had been enabled to acquire. His precepts are certainly worth an actor's consideration, but so far from being slavishly adopted, in many cases they must excite his contempt and distrust. The *art* of acting is a bubble which experience has long dissolved; it is a flower of spontaneous growth, which the hand of system may cultivate, but can never raise. Hill, however, with a wild defiance of natural law, thought actors might be fashioned at any time, and in one of his letters to Victor spoke of producing performers, never "seen, heard of, or thought of," who, at their very outset, should exhibit unquestionable power, and achieve unqualified success. To heighten the joke, these substitutes for certain "great men of the stage," whose loss the public was yet lamenting, were a parcel of boys who had been drilled "but a month or two" by their sanguine instructor! Hill lived long enough to feel the futility of his schemes, but never abandoned the notion upon which they were formed.

actors before us ; perhaps, too, by there being now an end of the frequent divisions and disorders that had, from time to time, broken in upon and frustrated their labours, not a little might be contributed to their success.

Collier, then, like a true liquorish courtier, observing the prosperity of a theatre, which he, the year before, had parted with for a worse, began to meditate an exchange of theatrical posts with Swiny, who had visibly very fair pretensions to that he was in, by his being first chosen, by the court, to regulate and rescue the stage from the disorders it had suffered, under its former managers : yet Collier knew that sort of merit could stand in no competition with his being a member of parliament ; he, therefore, had recourse to his court-interest (where mere will and pleasure, at that time, was the only law that disposed of all theatrical rights) to oblige Swiny to let him be off from his bad bargain for a better. To this it may be imagined Swiny demurred, and, as he had reason, strongly remonstrated against it : but as Collier had listed his conscience under the command of interest, he kept it to strict duty, and was immovable ; insomuch, that Sir John Vanbrugh, who was a friend to Swiny, and who, by his intimacy with the people in power, better knew the motive of their actions, advised Swiny rather to accept of the change, than, by a non-compliance, to hazard his being excluded from any post or concern in either of the theatres : to conclude, it was not long before Collier had procured a new license for acting plays, &c., for himself, Wilks, Dogget, and Cibber, exclusive of Swiny, who, by this new regulation, was reduced to his Hobson's choice of the opera.

Swiny being thus transferred to the opera in the sinking condition Collier had left it, found the receipts of it, in the winter following, 1711, so far short of the expenses, that he was driven to attend his fortune in some more favour-

able climate, where he remained twenty years an exile from his friends and country ; though there has been scarce an English gentleman, who, in his tour of France or Italy, has not renewed or created an acquaintance with him. As this is a circumstance that many people may have forgot, I cannot remember it without that regard and concern it deserves from all that know him. Yet it is some mitigation of his misfortune, that, since his return to England, his gray hairs and cheerful disposition have still found a general welcome among his foreign and former domestic acquaintance.

Collier, being now first-commissioned manager with the comedians, drove them, too, to the last inch of a hard bargain, the natural consequence of all treaties between power and necessity. He not only demanded six hundred a-year, neat money, the price at which he had farmed out his opera, and to make the business a sinecure to him ; but likewise insisted upon a moiety of the two hundred that had been levied upon us the year before, in aid of the operas ; in all seven hundred pounds. These large and ample conditions, considering in what hands we were, we resolved to swallow without wry faces ; rather chusing to run any hazard, than contend with a formidable power, against which we had no remedy. But so it happened that fortune took better care of our interest than we ourselves had like to have done, for had Collier accepted of our first offer of an equal share with us, he had got three hundred pounds a-year more, by complying with it, than by the sum he imposed upon us ; our shares being never less than a thousand annually, to each of us, till the end of the queen's reign, in 1714. After which, Collier's commission was superseded ; his theatrical post, upon the accession of his late majesty, being given to Sir Richard Steele.\*

\* This appointment he owed to the friendship of the Duke of Marlborough, in consequence of a pleasant repartee.

From these various revolutions in the government of the theatre, allowing to the patentees' mistaken principle of increasing their profits, by too far enslaving their people, and keeping down the price of good actors (and I could almost insist, that giving large salaries to bad ones, could not have had a worse consequence) I say, when it is considered that the authority for acting plays, &c., was thought of so little worth, that (as has been observed) Sir Thomas Skipwith gave away his share of it, and the adventurers had fled from it; that Mr. Congreve, at another time, had voluntarily resigned it; and Sir John Vanbrugh (merely to get the rent of his new house paid) had, by leave of the court, farmed out his license to Swiny, who, not without some hesitation had ventured upon it; let me say again, out of this low condition of the theatre, was it not owing to the industry of three or four comedians, that a new place was now created for the crown to give away, without any expense attending it, well worth the acceptance of any gentleman, whose merit or services had no higher claim to preferment, and which Collier and Sir Richard Steele, in the two last reigns, successively enjoyed? Though, I believe, I may have said something like this, in a former chapter, I am not unwilling it should be twice taken notice of.

We are now come to that firm establishment of the theatre, which, except the admittance of Booth into a share, and Dogget's retiring from it, met with no change or alteration for above twenty years after.

Collier, as has been said, having accepted of a certain appointment of seven hundred *per annum*; Wilks, Dogget, and myself were now the only acting managers, under the Queen's license; which, being a grant but during pleasure, obliged us to a conduct that might not undeserve that favour. At this time we were all in the vigour of our ca-

pacities as actors ; and our prosperity enabled us to pay, at least, double the salaries to what the same actors had usually received, or could have hoped for under the government of the patentees. Dogget, who was naturally an economist, kept our expenses and accounts to the best of his power, within regulated bounds and moderation. Wilks, who had a stronger passion for glory than lucre, was a little apt to be lavish in what was not always as necessary for the profit as the honour of the theatre : for example, at the beginning of almost every season he would order two or three suits to be made or refreshed for actors of moderate consequence, that his having constantly a new one for himself might seem less particular, though he had, as yet, no new part for it. This expeditious care of doing us good, without waiting for our consent to it, Dogget always looked upon with the eye of a man in pain : but I, who hated pain, (though I as little liked the favour as Dogget himself) rather chose to laugh at the circumstance, than complain of what I knew was not to be cured but by a remedy worse than the evil. Upon these occasions, therefore, whenever I saw him and his followers so prettily dressed out, for an old play, I only commended his fancy ; or, at most, but whispered him not to give himself so much trouble about others, upon whose performance it would but be thrown away : to which, with a smiling air of triumph over my want of penetration, he has replied—“ Why, now, that was what I really did it for ; to show others that I love to take care of them, as well as of myself.” Thus, whenever he made himself easy, he had not the least conception, let the expense be what it would, that we could possibly dislike it. And, from the same principle, provided a thinner audience were liberal of their applause, he gave himself little concern about the receipt of it. As in these different tempers of my brother managers there might

be equally something right and wrong, it was equally my business to keep well with them both : and, though of the two, I was rather inclined to Dogget's way of thinking, yet I was always under the disagreeable restraint of not letting Wilks see it : therefore, when in any material point of management they were ready to come to a rupture, I found it advisable to think neither of them absolutely in the wrong ; but by giving to one as much of the right, in his opinion, this way, as I took from the other in that, their differences were sometimes softened into concessions that I have reason to think prevented many ill consequences in our affairs, that otherwise might have attended them. But this was always to be done with a very gentle hand ; for as Wilks was apt to be easily hurt by opposition, so when he felt it he was apt to be insupportable. However, there were some points in which we were always unanimous. In the twenty years while we were our own directors, we never had a creditor that had occasion to come twice for his bill ; every Monday morning discharged us of all demands, before we took a shilling for our own use. And, from this time, we neither asked any actor, nor were desired by them, to sign any written agreement (to the best of my memory) whatsoever : the rate of their respective salaries were only entered in our daily pay-roll ; which plain record every one looked upon as good as city security : for where an honest meaning is mutual, the mutual confidence will be bond enough, in conscience, on both sides : but that I may not ascribe more to our conduct than was really its due, I ought to give fortune her share of the commendation ; for had not our success exceeded our expectation, it might not have been in our power so thoroughly to have observed those laudable rules of economy, justice, and lenity, which so happily supported us : but the severities and oppression we had suffered un-



der our former masters made us incapable of imposing them upon others ; which gave our whole society the cheerful looks of a rescued people. But notwithstanding this general cause of content, it was not above a year or two before the imperfection of human nature began to show itself in contrary symptoms. The merit of the hazards which the managers had run, and the difficulties they had combated, in bringing to perfection that revolution by which they had all so amply profited, in the amendment of their general income, began now to be forgotten ; their acknowledgments, and thankful promises of fidelity, were no more repeated, or scarce thought obligatory : ease and plenty, by an habitual enjoyment, had lost their novelty, and the largeness of their salaries seemed rather lessened than advanced, by the extraordinary gains of the undertakers ; for that is the scale in which the hired actor will always weigh his performance ; but whatever reason there may seem to be in his case, yet as he is frequently apt to throw a little self-partiality into the balance, that consideration may a good deal alter the justness of it. While the actors, therefore, had this way of thinking, happy was it for the managers, that their united interest was so inseparably the same, and that their skill and power in acting stood in a rank so far above the rest, that if the whole body of private men had deserted them, it would yet have been an easier matter for the managers to have picked up recruits, than for the deserters to have found proper officers to head them. Here, then, in this distinction lay our security : our being actors ourselves was an advantage to our government which all former managers, who were only idle gentlemen, wanted : nor was our establishment easily to be broken, while our health and limbs enabled us to be joint-labourers in the work we were masters of.

The only actor who, in the opinion of the public, seemed

to have had a pretence of being advanced to a share with us, was certainly Booth : but when it is considered how strongly he had opposed the measures that had made us managers, by setting himself (as has been observed) at the head of an opposite interest, he could not, as yet, have much to complain of : beside, if the court had thought him, now, an equal object of favour, it could not have been in our power, to have opposed his preferment. This I mention, not to take from his merit, but to show from what cause it was not, as yet, better provided for. Therefore, it may be no vanity to say our having at that time no visible competitors on the stage, was the only interest that raised us to be the managers of it.

But here let me rest awhile, and since, at my time of day, our best possessions are but ease and quiet, I must be content, if I will have sallies of pleasure, to take up with those only that are to be found in imagination. When I look back, therefore, on the storms of the stage we had been tossed in ; when I consider that various vicissitude of hopes and fears we had for twenty years struggled with, and found ourselves, at last, thus safely set on shore, to enjoy the produce of our own labours ; and to have raised those labours, by our skill and industry, to a much fairer profit than our task-masters, by all their severe and griping government, had ever reaped from them ; a good-natured reader, that is not offended at the comparison of great things with small, will allow was a triumph, in proportion, equal to those that have attended the most heroic enterprises for liberty. What transport could the first Brutus feel, upon his expulsion of the Tarquins, greater than that which now danced in the heart of a poor actor, who, from an injured labourer, unpaid his hire, had made himself, without guilt, a legal manager of his own fortune ? Let the grave and great condemn or yawn at these low conceits, but let me

be happy in the enjoyment of them ! To this hour my memory runs over that pleasing prospect of life past, with little less delight than when I was first in the real possession of it. This is the natural temper of my mind, which my acquaintance are frequently witnesses of. And as this was all the ambition Providence had made my obscure condition capable of, I am thankful that means were given me to enjoy the fruits of it.

————— Hoc est

Vivere bis, vitâ posse priore frui.

Something like the meaning of this the less learned reader may find in my title-page.

## CHAP. XIV.

*The stage in its highest prosperity.—The managers not without errors.—Of what kind.—“Cato” first acted.—What brought it to the stage.—The company go to Oxford.—Their success, and different auditors there.—Booth made a sharer.—Dogget objects to him.—Quits the stage upon his admittance.—That not his true reason.—What was.—Dogget’s theatrical character.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the managing actors were, now, in a happier situation than their utmost pretensions could have expected; yet it is not to be supposed but wiser men might have mended it. As we could not all govern ourselves, there were seasons when we were not all fit to govern others. Our passions and our interest drew not always the same way. *Self* had a great sway in our debates: we had our partialities; our prejudices; our favourites of less merit; and our jealousies of those who came too near us; frailties which societies of higher consideration, while they are composed of men, will not always be free from. To have been constantly capable of unanimity had been a blessing too great for our station: one mind among three people were to have had three masters to one servant; but when that one servant is called three different ways, at the same time, whose business is to be done first? For my own part, I was forced, almost all my life, to give up my share of him, and if I could, by art or persuasion, hinder others from making what I thought a wrong use of their power, it was the all and utmost I desired. Yet, whatever might be

our personal errors, I shall think I have no right to speak of them farther than where the public entertainment was affected by them. If, therefore, among so many, some particular actors were remarkable in any part of their private lives, that might sometimes make the world merry without doors, I hope my laughing friends will excuse me if I do not so far comply with their desires or curiosity, as to give them a place in my history. I can only recommend such anecdotes to the amusement of a noble person, who, in case I conceal them, does me the flattering honour to threaten my work with a supplement. 'Tis enough for me that such actors had their merits to the public : let those recite their imperfections who are themselves without them : it is my misfortune not to have that qualification. Let us see, then, whatever was amiss in it, how our administration went forward.

When we were first invested with this power, the joy of our so unexpectedly coming into it, kept us, for some time, in amity and good humour with one another : and the pleasure of reforming the many false measures, absurdities, and abuses, that, like weeds, had sucked up the due nourishment from the fruits of the theatre, gave us, as yet, no leisure for private dissensions. Our daily receipts exceeded our imagination : and we seldom met, as a board, to settle our weekly accounts, without the satisfaction of joint-heirs, just in possession of an unexpected estate that had been distantly intailed upon them. Such a sudden change of our condition, it may be imagined, could not but throw out of us a new spirit in almost every play we appeared in ; nor did we ever sink into that common negligence which is apt to follow good fortune : industry, we knew, was the life of our business ; that it not only concealed faults, but was of equal value to greater talents without it ; which the decadence once of Betterton's company in Lincoln's Inn Fields had lately shown us a proof of.

This then was that happy period when both actors and managers were in their highest enjoyment of general content and prosperity. Now it was that the politer world, too, by their decent attention, their sensible taste, and their generous encouragements to authors and actors, once more saw that the stage, under a due regulation, was capable of being what the wisest ages thought it *might* be, the most rational scheme that human wit could form, to dissipate, with innocence, the cares of life ; to allure even the turbulent or ill-disposed from worse meditations, and to give the leisure hours of business and virtue an instructive recreation.\*

If this grave assertion is less recommended by falling from the pen of a comedian, I must appeal for the truth of it to the tragedy of "Cato," which was first acted in 1712. I submit to the judgment of those who were then the sensible spectators of it, if the success and merit of that play were not an evidence of every article of that value which I have given to a decent theatre? But, as I was observing, it could not be expected the summer days I am speaking of, could be the constant weather of the year ; we had our clouded hours as well as our sunshine, and were not always in the same good humour with one another : fire, air, and water, could not be more vexatiously opposite than the different tempers of the three managers, though they might equally have their useful, as well as their destructive qualities. How variously these elements, in our several dispositions, operated, may be judged from the following single instance, as well as a thousand others, which, if they were all to be told, might possibly make my reader wish I had forgotten them.

\* "The stage might be made a perpetual source of the most noble and useful entertainments, were it under proper regulations."—  
"Spectator ;" No. 93.

Much about this time, then, there came over from Dublin theatre two uncelebrated actors, to pick up a few pence among us, in the winter, as Wilks had, a year or two before, done on their side the water, in the summer. But it was not so clear to Dogget and myself, that it was in their power to do us the same service in Drury-lane, as Wilks might have done them in Dublin. However, Wilks was so much a man of honour, that he scorned to be outdone in the least point of it, let the cost be what it would to his fellow managers, who had no particular accounts of honour open with them. To acquit himself, therefore, with a better grace, Wilks so ordered it, that his Hibernian friends were got upon our stage, before any other manager had well heard of their arrival. This so generous dispatch of their affair gave Wilks a very good chance of convincing his friends that himself was sole master of the masters of the company. Here, now, the different elements in our tempers began to work with us. While Wilks was only animated by a grateful hospitality to his friends, Dogget was ruffled into a storm, and looked upon this generosity as so much insult and injustice upon himself and the fraternity. During this disorder I stood by, a seeming quiet passenger, and since talking to the winds, I knew, could be to no great purpose, whatever weakness it might be called, could not help smiling to observe with what officious ease and delight Wilks was treating his friends at our expense, who were scarce acquainted with them: for, it seems, all this was to end in their having a benefit play, in the height of the season, for the unprofitable service they had done us, without our consent or desire to employ them. Upon this Dogget bounced, and grew almost as untractable as Wilks himself. Here, again, I was forced to clap my patience to the helm, to weather this difficult point between them: applying myself, therefore, to the person I imagined was most

likely to hear me, I desired Dogget to consider that I must, naturally, be as much hurt by this vain and overbearing behaviour in Wilks as he could be; and that, though it was true, these actors had no pretence to the favour designed them, yet we could not say they had done us any farther harm, than letting the town see the parts they had been shown in had been better done by those to whom they properly belonged: yet, as we had greatly profited by the extraordinary labour of Wilks, who acted long parts almost every day, and at least twice to Dogget's once; and that [though] I granted it might not be so much his consideration of our common interest, as his fondness for applause, that set him to work, yet even that vanity, if he supposed it such, had its merit to us; and as we had found our account in it, it would be folly upon a punctilio, to tempt the rashness of a man who was capable to undo all he had done, by any act of extravagance that might fly into his head: that, admitting this benefit might be some little loss to us, yet to break with him upon it could not but be ten times of worse consequence, than our overlooking his disagreeable manner of making the demand upon us.

Though I found this had made Dogget drop the severity of his features, yet he endeavoured still to seem uneasy, by his starting a new objection, which was, that we could not be sure even of the charge they were to pay for it. "For Wilks," said he, "you know, will go any lengths to make it a good day to them, and may whisper the door-keepers to give them the ready money taken, and return the account in such tickets, only, as these actors have not themselves disposed of." To make this easy, too, I gave him my word to be answerable for the charge myself. Upon this he acceded, and accordingly they had the benefit play. But so it happened, whether as Dogget had suspected or not I cannot say, the ready money received fell



ten pounds short of the sum they had agreed to pay for it. Upon the Saturday following, the day on which we constantly made up our accounts, I went early to the office, and inquired if the ten pounds had yet been paid in ; but not hearing that one shilling of it had found its way thither, I immediately supplied the sum out of my own pocket, and directed the treasurer to charge it received from me, in the deficient receipt of the benefit day. Here, now, it might be imagined, all this silly matter was accommodated, and that no one could so properly say he was aggrieved as myself. But let us observe what the consequence says. Why, the effect of my insolent interposing honesty proved to be this,—that the party most obliged was the most offended ; and the offence was imputed to me, who had been ten pounds out of pocket, to be able to commit it : for when Wilks found, in the account, how spitefully the ten pounds had been paid in, he took me aside into the adjacent stone passage, and with some warmth asked me what I meant by pretending to pay in this ten pounds, and [said] that, for his part, he did not understand such treatment. To which I replied, that, though I was amazed at his thinking himself ill-treated, I would give him a plain, justifiable answer,—that I had given my word to Dogget the charge of the benefit should be fully paid, and, since his friends had neglected it, I found myself bound to make it good. Upon which he told me I was mistaken if I thought he did not see into the bottom of all this ; that Dogget and I were always endeavouring to thwart and make him uneasy ; but he was able to stand upon his own legs, and we should find he would not be used so ; that he took this payment of the ten pounds as an insult upon him, and a slight to his friends ; but rather than suffer it he would tear the whole business to pieces ; that I knew it was in his power to do it ; and if he could not do a civil thing to a friend, without

all this senseless rout about it, he could be received in Ireland upon his own terms, and could as easily mend a company there, as he had done here; that if he were gone, Dogget and I would not be able to keep the doors open a week, and, by G——, he would not be a drudge for nothing. As I knew all this was but the foam of the high value he had set upon himself, I thought it not amiss to seem a little silently concerned for the helpless condition to which his resentment of the injury I have related was going to reduce us: for I knew I had a friend in his heart, that if I gave him a little time to cool, would soon bring him to reason. The sweet morsel of a thousand pounds a-year was not to be met with at every table, and might tempt a nicer palate than his own to swallow it, when he was not out of humour. This, I knew, would always be of weight with him, when the best arguments I could use would be of none. I therefore gave him no farther provocation, than by gravely telling him, we all had it in our power to do one another a mischief; but I believed none of us much cared to hurt ourselves; that, if he was not of my opinion, it would not be in my power to hinder whatever new scheme he might resolve upon; that London would always have a play-house, and I should have some chance in it, though it might not be so good as it had been; that he might be sure if I had thought my paying in the ten pounds could have been so ill received, I should have been glad to have saved it. Upon this he seemed to mutter something to himself, and walked off, as if he had a mind to be alone. I took the occasion, and returned to Dogget, to finish our accounts. In about six minutes Wilks came in to us, not in the best humour, it may be imagined; yet not in so ill a one, but that he took his share of the ten pounds, without showing the least contempt of it; which, had he been proud enough to have refused, or to have paid in himself, I

might have thought he intended to make good his menaces, and that the injury I had done him would never have been forgiven; but it seems we had different ways of thinking.

Of this kind, more or less delightful, was the life I led with this impatient man, for full twenty years. Dogget, as we shall find, could not hold it so long; but as he had more money than I, he had not occasion for so much philosophy. And thus were our theatrical affairs frequently disconcerted by this irascible commander, this Achilles of our confederacy; who, I may be bold to say, came very little short of the spirit Horace gives to that hero in his—

- Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.

This, then, is one of those personal anecdotes of our variances, which, as our public performances were affected by it, could not, with regard to truth and justice, be omitted.

From this time, to the year 1712, my memory, from which repository, alone, every article of what I write is collected, has nothing worth mentioning, till the first acting of the tragedy of “Cato.” As to the play itself, it might be enough to say that the author and the actors had their different hopes of fame and profit amply answered by the performance; but as its success was attended with remarkable consequences, it may not be amiss to trace it, from its several years’ concealment in the closet, to the stage.

In 1703, nine years before it was acted, I had the pleasure of reading the first four acts, which was all of it then written, privately with Sir Richard Steele: it may be needless to say it was impossible to lay them out of my hand till I had gone through them, or to dwell upon the delight his friendship to the author received, upon my being so warmly pleased with them: but my satisfaction was as highly

disappointed, when he told me, whatever spirit Mr. Addison had shown in his writing it, he doubted he would never have courage enough to let his "Cato" stand the censure of an English audience; that it had only been the amusement of his leisure hours in Italy, and was never intended for the stage. This poetical diffidence Sir Richard himself spoke of with some concern, and in the transport of his imagination, could not help saying, "Good God, what a part would Betterton make of *Cato*!" But this was seven years before Betterton died, and when Booth, who afterwards made his fortune by acting it, was in his theatrical minority. In the latter end of Queen Ann's reign, when our national politics had changed hands, the friends of Mr. Addison then thought it a proper time to animate the public with the sentiments of "Cato;" in a word, their importunities were too warm to be resisted; and it was no sooner finished than hurried to the stage, in April 1712, at a time when three days a-week were usually appointed for the benefit plays of particular actors: but a work of that critical importance was to make its way through all private considerations; nor could it possibly give place to a custom which the breach of could very little prejudice the benefits, that, on so unavoidable an occasion, were (in part, though not wholly) postponed; it was, therefore, Mondays excepted, acted every day for a month, to constantly crowded houses. As the author had made us a present of whatever profits he might have claimed from it, we thought ourselves obliged to spare no cost in the proper decorations of it. Its coming so late in the season to the stage proved of particular advantage to the sharing actors; because the harvest of our annual gains was generally over before the middle of March; many select audiences being then usually reserved in favour to the benefits of private actors; which fixed engagements naturally abated the receipts of the days

before and after them : but this unexpected after-crop of "Cato" largely supplied to us those deficiencies, and was almost equal to two fruitful seasons, in the same year ; at the close of which, the three managing actors found themselves each a gainer of thirteen hundred and fifty pounds : but to return to the first reception of this play from the public.

Although "Cato" seems plainly written upon what are called whig principles, yet the tories of that time had sense enough not to take it as the least reflection upon their administration ; but, on the contrary, they seemed to brandish and vaunt their approbation of every sentiment in favour of liberty, which, by a public act of their generosity, was carried so high, that one day, while the play was acting, they collected fifty guineas in the boxes, and made a present of them to Booth, with this compliment : " For his honest opposition to a perpetual dictator ; and his dying so bravely in the cause of liberty." What was insinuated by any part of these words is not my affair ; but so public a reward had the appearance of a laudable spirit, which only such a play as "Cato" could have inspired ; nor could Booth be blamed if, upon so particular a distinction of his merit, he began himself to set more value upon it : how far he might carry it, in making use of the favour he stood in with a certain nobleman\* then in power at court, was not difficult to penetrate ; and, indeed, ought always to have been expected by the managing actors : for which of them, making the case every way his own, could, with such advantages, have contented himself in the humble station of an hired actor ? But let us see how the managers stood severally affected upon this occasion.

Dogget, who expected, though he feared not, the at-

\* Lord Bolingbroke.

tempt of what after happened, imagined he had thought of an expedient to prevent it: and, to cover his design with all the art of a statesman, he insinuated to us (for he was a stanch whig) that this present of fifty guineas was a sort of a tory triumph, which they had no pretence to; and that, for his part, he could not bear that so redoubted a champion for liberty as *Cato*, should be bought off to the cause of a contrary party: he, therefore, in the seeming zeal of his heart, proposed that the managers themselves should make the same present to Booth which had been made him, from the boxes, the day before. This, he said, would recommend the equality and liberal spirit of our management to the town, and might be a means to secure Booth more firmly to our interest; it never having been known that the skill of the best actor had received so round a reward or gratuity, in one day, before. Wilks, who wanted nothing but abilities to be as cunning as Dogget, was so charmed with the proposal, that he longed, that moment, to make Booth the present with his own hands; and, though he knew he had no right to do it without my consent, had no patience to ask it; upon which I turned to Dogget, with a cold smile, and told him, that if Booth could be purchased at so cheap a rate, it would be one of the best proofs of his economy we had ever been beholden to: I therefore desired we might have a little patience; that our doing it too hastily might be only making sure of an occasion to throw the fifty guineas away; for if we should be obliged to do better for him, we could never expect that Booth would think himself bound, in honour, to refund them. This seemed so absurd an argument to Wilks, that he began, with his usual freedom of speech, to treat it as a pitiful evasion of their intended generosity: but Dogget, who was not so wide of my meaning, clapping his hand upon mine, said, with an air of security, “O, don’t trouble

yourself; there must be two words to that bargain; let me alone to manage that matter." Wilks, upon this dark discourse, grew uneasy, as if there were some secret between us that he was to be left out of. Therefore, to avoid the shock of his intemperance, I was reduced to tell him that it was my opinion that Booth would never be made easy by any thing we could do for him, till he had a share in the profits and management; and that, as he did not want friends to assist him, whatever his merit might be before, every one would think, since his acting of *Cato*, he had now enough to back his pretensions to it. To which Dogget replied, that nobody could think his merit was slighted by so handsome a present as fifty guineas; and that, for his farther pretensions, whatever the license might avail, our property of house, scenes, and clothes, was our own, and not in the power of the crown to dispose of. To conclude, my objections that the money would be only thrown away, &c., were overruled, and the same night Booth had the fifty guineas, which he received with a thankfulness that made Wilks and Dogget perfectly easy; insomuch, that they seemed for some time to triumph in their conduct, and often endeavoured to laugh my jealousy out of countenance: but, in the following winter, the game happened to take a different turn; and then, if it had been a laughing matter, I had as strong an occasion to smile at their former security. But, before I make an end of this matter, I cannot pass over the good fortune of the company that followed us to the act at Oxford, which was held in the intervening summer: perhaps, too, a short view of the stage, in that different situation, may not be unacceptable to the curious.

After the restoration of King Charles, before the cavalier and round-head parties, under their new denomination of whig and tory, began again to be politically troublesome,

public acts at Oxford, as I find by the date of several prologues written by Dryden, for Hart on those occasions, had been more frequently held than in later reigns. Whether the same party dissensions may have occasioned the discontinuance of them, is a speculation not necessary to be entered into. But these academical jubilees have usually been looked upon as a kind of congratulatory compliment to the accession of every new prince to the throne, and generally, as such, have attended them. King James, notwithstanding his religion, had the honour of it; at which the players, as usual, assisted. This I have only mentioned, to give the reader a theatrical anecdote of a liberty which Tony Leigh, the comedian, took with the character of the well-known Obadiah Walker,\* then head of University College, who, in that prince's reign, had turned Roman catholic: the circumstance is this.

In the latter end of the comedy called the "Committee," Leigh, who acted the part of *Teague*, hauling in *Obadiah*, with an halter about his neck, whom, according to his written part, he was to threaten to hang, for no better reason than his refusing to drink the king's health, here Leigh, to justify his purpose with a stronger provocation, put himself into a more than ordinary heat with his captive *Obadiah*, which having heightened his master's curiosity to know what *Obadiah* had done, to deserve such usage, Leigh, folding his arms, with a ridiculous stare of astonishment, replied, "Upon my shoul, he has shange his religion." As the

\* This man, a native of Yorkshire, obtained his education in University-college, Oxford, of which he rose to be master, but was displaced at the revolution, for his superstitious attachment to popery, which he had embraced with the view of court-favour. Radcliffe, the physician, who had been his scholar, received him into his house, where he died in 1698.



merit of this jest lay chiefly in the auditors' sudden application of it to the *Obadiah* of Oxford, it was received with all the triumph of applause which the zeal of a different religion could inspire. But Leigh was given to understand that the king was highly displeased at it, inasmuch as it had shown him that the university was in a temper to make a jest of his proselyte. But to return to the conduct of our own affairs there, in 1712.

It had been a custom for the comedians, while at Oxford, to act twice a day; the first play ending every morning, before the college hours of dining, and the other never to break into the time of shutting their gates in the evening. This extraordinary labour gave all the hired actors a title to double pay, which, at the act in King William's time, I had myself accordingly received there. But the present managers, considering that by acting only once a day their spirits might be fresher for every single performance, and that, by this, means, they might be able to fill up the term of their residence without the repetition of their best and strongest plays; and as their theatre was contrived to hold a full third more than the usual form of it had done, one house, well filled, might answer the profits of two but moderately taken up: being enabled, too, by their late success at London to make the journey pleasant and profitable to the rest of their society, they resolved to continue to them their double pay, notwithstanding this new abatement of half their labour. This conduct of the managers more than answered their intention, which was rather to get nothing themselves, than not let their fraternity be the better for the expedition. Thus they laid an obligation upon their company, and were themselves considerable, though unexpected, gainers by it. But my chief reason for bringing the reader to Oxford, was to show the different taste of plays there from that which prevailed at London. A great

deal of that false flashy wit, and forced humour, which had been the delight of our metropolitan multitude, was only rated there at its bare intrinsic value; applause was not to be purchased there, but by the true sterling, the *saluticum* of a genius; unless where the skill of the actor passed it upon them, with some extraordinary strokes of nature. Shakspeare and Jonson had there a sort of classical authority, for whose masterly scenes they seemed to have as implicit a reverence, as formerly for the ethics of Aristotle; and were as incapable of allowing moderns to be their competitors, as of changing their academical habits for gaudy colours or embroidery. Whatever merit, therefore, some few of our more politely-written comedies might pretend to, they had not the same effect upon the imagination there, nor were received with that extraordinary applause they had met with from the people of mode and pleasure in London, whose vain accomplishments did not dislike themselves in the glass that was held to them. The elegant follies of higher life were not at Oxford among their acquaintance, and, consequently, might not be so good company to a learned audience, as nature in her plain dress, and unornamented in her pursuits and inclinations, seemed to be.

The only distinguished merit allowed to any modern writer was to the author of "Cato," which play, being the flower of a plant raised in that learned garden, for there Mr. Addison had his education, what favour may we not suppose was due to him, from an audience of brethren, who from that local relation to him, might naturally have a warmer pleasure in their benevolence to his fame? But, not to give more weight to this imaginary circumstance than it may bear, the fact was that on our first day of acting it our house was, in a manner, invested; and entrance demanded by twelve o'clock at noon, and, before one, it was not wide

enough for many who came too late for places. The same crowds continued for three days together, (an uncommon curiosity in that place) and the death of *Cato* triumphed over the injuries of *Cæsar*, every where. To conclude, our reception at Oxford, whatever our merit might be, exceeded our expectation. At our taking leave, we had the thanks of the Vice Chancellor, for the decency and order observed by our whole society; an honour which had not always been paid upon the same occasions; for at the act in King William's time, I remember some pranks of a different nature had been complained of. Our receipts had not only enabled us, as I have observed, to double the pay of every actor, but to afford out of them towards the repair of St. Mary's church, the contribution of fifty pounds: besides which, each of the three managers had to his respective share, clear of all charges, one hundred and fifty more, for his one-and-twenty days' labour; which, being added to his thirteen hundred and fifty shared in the winter preceding, amounted, in the whole, to fifteen hundred, the greatest sum ever known to have been shared, in one year, to that time: and to the honour of our auditors, here and elsewhere, be it spoken, all this was raised without the aid of those barbarous entertainments with which, some few years after, upon the re-establishment of two contending companies, we were forced to disgrace the stage, to support it.

This, therefore, is that remarkable period when the stage, during my time upon it, was the least reproachable: and it may be worth the public observation, if anything I have said of it can be so, that *one* stage may, as I have proved it has done, very laudably support itself by such spectacles only as are fit to delight a sensible people; but the equal prosperity of *two* stages has always been of a very short duration. If, therefore, the public should ever recover into the true taste of that time, and stick to it, the stage must

come into it, or *starve*; as, whenever the general taste is vulgar, the stage must come down to it, to *live*. But I ask pardon of the multitude, who, in all regulations of the stage, may expect to be a little indulged in what they like: if, therefore, they *will* have a may-pole, why, the players must *give* them a may-pole; but I only *speak*, in case they should keep an old custom of changing their minds, and by their privilege of being in the *wrong*, should take a fancy, by way of variety, of being in the *right*. Then, in such a case, what I have said may appear to have been no intended design against their liberty of judging for themselves.

After our return from Oxford, Booth was at full leisure to solicit his admission to a share in the management, in which he succeeded, about the beginning of the following winter: accordingly a new license (recalling all former licenses) was issued, wherein Booth's name was added to those of the other managers. But still there was a difficulty in his qualification to be adjusted,—what consideration he should allow for an equal title to our stock of clothes, scenes, &c., without which the license was of no more use than the stock was without the license; or, at least, if there were any difference, the former managers seemed to have the advantage in it; the stock being entirely theirs, and three parts in four of the license; for Collier, though now but a fifth manager, still insisted on his former appointment of seven hundred pounds a-year; which, in equity, ought certainly to have been proportionably abated: but court-favour was not always measured by *that* yard. Collier's matter was soon out of the question; his pretensions were too visible to be contested; but the affair of Booth was not so clear a point. The Lord Chamberlain, therefore, only recommended it to be adjusted among ourselves; which, to say the truth, at that time was a greater indul-

gence than I expected. Let us see, then, how this critical case was handled.

Wilks was of opinion that to set a good round value upon our stock was the only way to come near an equivalent for the diminution of our shares, which the admission of Booth must occasion : but Dogget insisted that he had no mind to dispose of any part of his property, and therefore would set no price upon it at all. Though I allowed that both these opinions might be grounded on a good deal of equity, yet I was not sure that either of them was practicable ; and therefore told them, that when they could both agree which of them could be made so, they might rely on my consent, in any shape. In the meantime, I desired they would consider that as our license subsisted only during pleasure, we could not pretend that the Queen might not recal or alter it : but that, to speak out, without mincing the matter on either side, the truth was plainly this : that Booth had a manifest merit as an actor, and as he was not supposed to be a whig, it was as evident, that, a good deal for that reason, a secretary of state had taken him into his protection, which I was afraid the weak pretence of our invaded property would not be able to contend with : that his having signalised himself in the character of *Cato*, whose principles the tories had affected to have taken into their own possession, was a very popular pretence of making him free of the stage, by advancing him to the profits of it. And, as we had seen that the stage was frequently treated as if it was not supposed to have any property at all, this favour intended to Booth was thought a right occasion to avow that opinion, by disposing of its property at pleasure. But be that as it might, I owned it was not so much my apprehensions of what the court might do, that swayed me into an accommodation with Booth, as what the town, in whose favour he now apparently stood, might think *ought*

to be done. That there might be more danger in contesting their arbitrary will and pleasure, than in disputing this less terrible strain of the prerogative. That if Booth were only imposed upon us from his merit to the court, we were then in the condition of other subjects. Then, indeed, law, right, and possession, might have a tolerable tug for our property; but, as the town would always look upon his merit to *them* in a stronger light, and be judges of it themselves, it would be a weak and idle endeavour in us not to sail with the stream, when we might possibly make a merit of our cheerfully admitting him: that though his former opposition to our interest might, between man and man, a good deal justify our not making an earlier friend of him, yet that was a disobligation, out of the town's regard, and consequently would be of no weight against so approved an actor's being preferred. But all this notwithstanding, if they could both agree in a different opinion, I would, at the hazard of any consequence, be guided by it.

Here, now, will be shown another instance of our different tempers: Dogget, who, in all matters that concerned our common weal and interest, little regarded our opinion, and, even to an obstinacy, walked by his own, looked only out of humour at what I had said, and without thinking himself obliged to give any reason for it, declared he would maintain his property. Wilks, who, upon the same occasions, was as remarkably ductile as, when his superiority on the stage was in question, he was assuming and intractable, said, for his part, provided our business of acting was not interrupted, he did not care what we did: but, in short, he was for playing on, come what would of it. This last part of his declaration I did not dislike, and therefore I desired we might all enter into an immediate treaty with Booth, upon the terms of his admission. Dogget still sullenly replied, that he had no occasion to enter into any treaty.

Wilks then, to soften him, proposed that, if I liked it, Dogget might undertake it himself. I agreed. No; he would not be concerned in it. I then offered the same trust to Wilks, if Dogget approved of it. Wilks said he was not good at making of bargains, but, if I was willing, he would rather leave it to me. Dogget, at this, rose up, and said we might both do as we pleased, but that nothing but the law should make him part with his property, and so went out of the room. After which he never came among us more, either as an actor or manager.

By his having, in this abrupt manner, abdicated his post in our government, what he left of it naturally devolved upon Wilks and myself. However, this did not so much distress our affair as I have reason to believe Dogget thought it would: for though, by our indentures tripartite, we could not dispose of his property without his consent, yet those indentures could not oblige us to fast because he had no appetite; and if the mill did not grind, we could have no bread: we therefore determined, at any hazard, to keep our business still going, and that our safest way would be, to make the best bargain we could with Booth; one article of which was to be, that Booth should stand equally answerable with us to Dogget for the consequence: to which Booth made no objection, and the rest of his agreement was to allow us six hundred pounds for his share in our property, which was to be paid by such sums as should arise from half his profits of acting, till the whole was discharged: yet, so cautious were we in this affair, that this agreement was only verbal on our part, though written and signed by Booth, as what entirely contented him: however, bond and judgment could not have made it more seure to him, for he had his share, and was able to discharge the incumbrance upon it by his income of that year only. Let us see what Dogget did in this affair, after he had left us.

\* Might it not be imagined that Wilks and myself, by having made this matter easy to Booth, should have deserved the approbation, at least, if not the favour of the court, that had exerted so much power to prefer him? But shall I be believed when I affirm that Dogget, who had so strongly opposed the court in his admission to a share, was very near getting the better of us both, upon that account, and for some time appeared to have more favour there than either of us? Let me tell out my story, and then think what you please of it.

Dogget, who was equally obliged with us to act upon the stage as to assist in the management of it, though he had refused to do either, still demanded of us his whole share of the profits, without considering what part of them Booth might pretend to, from our late concessions. After many fruitless endcavours to bring him back to us, Booth joined with us in making him an offer of half a share, if he had a mind totally to quit the stage and make it a sinecure. No ; he wanted the whole, and to sit still himself, while we (if we pleased) might work for him, or let it alone, and none of us all, neither he nor we, be the better for it. What we imagined encouraged him to hold us at this short defiance was, that he had laid up enough to live upon, without the stage, for he was one of those close economists whom prodigals call a miser, and therefore partly from an inclination, as an invincible whig, to signalise himself in defence of his property, and as much presuming that our necessities would oblige us to come to his own terms, he was determined, even against the opinion of his friends, to make no other peace with us. But not being able, by this inflexible perseverance, to have his wicked will of us, he was resolved to go to the fountain-head of his own distress, and try if from thence he could turn the current against us. He appealed to the Vice Chamberlain, to whose direction the adjusting



of all these theatrical difficulties was then committed. But there, I dare say, the reader does not expect he should meet with much favour. However, be that as it may ; for whether any regard was had to his having some thousands in his pocket, or that he was considered as a man who would or could make more noise in the matter than courtiers might care for ; or what charms, spells, or conjurations he might make use of, is all darkness to me ; yet so it was, he, one way or other, played his part so well, that, in a few days after, we received an order from the Vice Chamberlain, positively commanding us to pay Dogget his whole share, notwithstanding we had complained before of his having withdrawn himself from acting on the stage, and from the management of it. This I thought was a dainty distinction, indeed ; that Dogget's defiance of the commands in favour of Booth should be rewarded with so ample a sinecure, and that we, for our obedience, should be condemned to dig in the mine, to pay it him. This bitter pill, I confess, was more than I could down with, and therefore soon determined, at all events, never to take it. But, as I had a man of power to deal with, it was not my business to speak *out* to him, or to set forth our treatment in its proper colours. My only doubt was whether I could bring Wilks into the same sentiments, for he never cared to litigate any thing that did not affect his figure upon the stage ; but I had the good fortune to lay our condition in so precarious and disagreeable a light to him, if we submitted to this order, that he fired before I could get through half the consequences of it ; and I began now to find it more difficult to keep him within bounds, than I had before to alarm him. I then proposed to him this expedient ; that we should draw up a remonstrance, neither seeming to refuse or comply with this order, but to start such objections and perplexing dif-

ficulties as should make the whole impracticable ; that under such distractions as this would raise in our affairs, we could not be answerable to keep open our doors, which consequently would destroy the fruit of the favour lately granted to Booth, as well as of this intended to Dogget himself. To this remonstrance we received an answer in writing, which varied something in the measures to accommodate matters with Dogget. This was all I desired. When I found the style of *sic jubeo* was altered ; when this formidable power began to parley with us, we knew there could not be much to be feared from it ; for I would have remonstrated till I had died rather than have yielded to the roughest or smoothest persuasion that could intimidate or deceive us. By this conduct we made the affair, at last, too troublesome for the ease of a courtier to go through with ; for, when it was considered that the principal point, the admission of Booth was got over, Dogget was fairly left to the law for relief.

Upon this disappointment, Dogget accordingly preferred a bill in Chancery against us. Wilks, who hated all business but that of entertaining the public, left the conduct of our cause to me ; in which we had, at our first setting out, this advantage of Dogget, that we had three pockets to support our expense, where he had but one. My first direction to our solicitor was to use all possible delay that the law would admit of ; a direction that lawyers seldom neglect ; by this means we hung up our plaintiff about two years in Chancery, till we were at full leisure to come to a hearing before the Lord Chancellor Cowper, which did not happen till after the accession of his late majesty. The issue of it was this. Dogget had about fourteen days allowed him to make his election, whether he would return to act as usual ; but he declaring, by his counsel, that he rather chose to quit the stage, he was decreed six hundred

pounds for his share in our property, with fifteen *per cent.* interest, from the date of the last license; upon the receipt of which, both parties were to sign general releases, and severally to pay their own costs. By this decree, Dogget, when his lawyer's bill was paid, scarcely got one year's purchase of what we had offered him without law, which, as he survived but seven years after it, would have been an annuity of five hundred pounds, and a sinecure for life.\*

\* Thomas Dogget was born in Castle-street, Dublin, though at what period it is impossible to ascertain, and made his first theatrical attempt upon the stage of that metropolis. Not meeting with the encouragement there that his merit deserved, he came over to England, and joined a travelling company, from which he very soon removed to London, and established himself at Drury-lane theatre. His admirable performance of a part (1) in D'Urfey's "Marriage-hater," in the year 1692, first brought his talent into notice, and the excellence he displayed shortly afterwards as *Fondlewife*, in the "Old Bachelor," enlarged his reputation. Downs, in the "Roscius Anglicanus," pays a high compliment to each of these personations.

When the new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields was built and opened under the auspices of Betterton, Mr. Dogget withdrew from Drury-lane, and sustained his celebrated character of *Ben*, in "Love for Love," with which the revolvers commenced their season. Here he was universally approved in every part he undertook, till upon the removal of this company to the Haymarket, when he retired for a short time, and only returned to assist at Betterton's benefit, (2) in April 1709. When Collier, by displacing Rich, obtained his license for Drury-lane theatre, Dogget resumed his antient station, and, with Wilks and Cibber, was

(1) *Solon*.

(2) It is expressly said in the "Tattler," No. 1, that he was not "concerned in the house," when that event took place.

Though there are many persons living who know every article of these facts to be true, yet it will be found that

admitted to a division of its profits and power. Downs, about this time, is very lavish in his praise of Dogget, whose reputation was, indeed, so high, that Steele honours him with the appellation of "famous," and unequivocally terms him the "best of comedians." (3). He was certainly, in general opinion, an original and peerless actor; a close copier of nature in all her attitudes or disguises; a man so sensible of what his own natural abilities could effect, that he never ventured upon any part to which they were not adapted. In addition to his great skill in dressing, it is said he could also colour his face with such exactness, as to represent the different degrees of old age most distinctly; which occasioned Sir Godfrey Kneller to tell him one day, at Button's, that he excelled him in painting; for, that he could only copy nature from the originals before him, while Dogget varied them at pleasure, and yet preserved a strong likeness.

According to Aston, he was "a little, lively, spract man," and there is a portrait of him in the collection of Mr. Mathews, which shows his countenance, though far from handsome, to have been animated and agreeable. In company, his behaviour was modest, cheerful, and complaisant; and though his education had been greatly neglected, he possessed a large share of natural intelligence. He was master of a strolling company, at some period of his life, for several years, and set his troop so excellent an example of feeling and conduct, that they lived, wherever they went, in comfort and respectability.

Though Dogget, as we have seen, renounced his share in the management when Booth was forced upon him and his associates, still his name was retained in the patent procured by Sir Richard Steele. By trafficking in the funds, and frugality in the application of his income, he had amassed a handsome property at the

the strongest of them was not the strongest occasion of Dogget's quitting the stage. If, therefore, the reader should not have curiosity enough to know how the public came to be deprived of so valuable an actor, let him consider that he is not obliged to go through the rest of this chapter, which I fairly tell him, before-hand, will only be filled up with a few idle anecdotes leading to that discovery.

After our law-suit was ended, Dogget, for some few years, could scarcely bear the sight of Wilks or myself; though, as shall be shown, for different reasons: yet it was his misfortune to meet with us almost every day. Button's Coffee-house, so celebrated in the "Tattler" for the good company that came there, was at this time in its highest request. Addison, Steele, Pope, and several other gentlemen of different merit, then made it their constant rendezvous. Nor could Dogget decline the agreeable conversation there, though he was daily sure to find Wilks or myself in the same place to sour his share of it: for as Wilks and he were differently proud, the one rejoicing in a captious, over-bearing, valiant pride, and the other, in a

time of his retirement, with which he enjoyed himself till his death, at Eltham, in Kent, on the 22nd of September, 1721.

The political principles of Mr. Dogget were so strong, that, to mark his veneration for the house of Hanover, he left a waterman's coat and badge to be rowed for, annually, on the first of August, in honour of its accession, on that day, to the throne of these realms. The expense of this prize is defrayed by the interest of a certain sum appropriated to that purpose, and is still contended for by half-a-dozen rowers.

Dogget wrote a comedy, called the "Country Wake," which having been reduced to a ballad-farce, is still occasionally performed under the title of a "Flora; or, Hob in the Well."

stiff, sullen, purse pride ; it may be easily conceived, when two such tempers met, how agreeable the sight of one was to the other. And as Dogget knew I had been the conductor of our defence against his law-suit, which had hurt him more for the loss he had sustained in his reputation of understanding business, which he valued himself upon, than his disappointment had of getting so little by it, it was no wonder if I was entirely out of his good graces, which, I confess, I was inclined upon any reasonable terms to have recovered ; he being of all my theatrical brethren the man I most delighted in ; for, when he was not in a fit of wisdom, or not over-concerned about his interest, he had a great deal of entertaining humour : I therefore, notwithstanding his reserve, always left the door open to our former intimacy, if he were inclined to come into it. I never failed to give him my hat, and, “ Your servant,” wherever I met him ; neither of which he would ever return, for above a year after ; but I still persisted in my usual salutation, without observing whether it was civilly received or not. This ridiculous silence between two comedians that had so lately lived in a constant course of raillery with one another, was often smiled at by our acquaintance who frequented the same coffee-house, and one of them carried his jest upon it so far that, when I was at some distance from town, he wrote me a formal account that Dogget was actually dead. After the first surprise his letter gave me was over, I began to consider that this, coming from a droll friend to both of us, might possibly be written to extract some merriment out of my real belief of it : in this I was not unwilling to gratify him, and returned an answer, as if I had taken the truth of his news for granted ; and was not a little pleased that I had so fair an opportunity of speaking my mind freely of Dogget, which I did in some favour of his character ; I excused his

faults, and was just to his merit. His law-suit with us I only imputed to his having naturally deceived himself in the justice of his cause. What I most complained of was, his irreconcilable disaffection to me upon it, whom he could not reasonably blame for standing in my own defence; that not to endure me after it was a reflection upon his sense, when all our acquaintance had been witnesses of our former intimacy; which my behaviour in his lifetime had plainly shown him I had a mind to renew. But since he was now gone, however great a churl he was to me, I was sorry my correspondent had lost him.

This part of my letter I was sure, if Dogget's eyes were still open, would be shown to him; if not, I had only written it to no purpose. But, about a month after, when I came to town, I had some little reason to imagine it had the effect I wished from it; for one day, sitting over against him at the same coffee-house, where we often mixed at the same table, though we never exchanged a single syllable, he graciously extended his hand for a pinch of my snuff: as this seemed, from him, a sort of breaking the ice of his temper, I took courage, upon it, to break silence on my side, and asked him how he liked it. To which, with a slow hesitation, naturally assisted by the action of his taking the snuff, he replied—"Umph! the best—umph!—I have tasted a great while."—If the reader, who may possibly think all this extremely trifling, will consider that trifles sometimes show characters in as strong a light as facts of more serious importance, I am in hopes he may allow that my matter less needs an excuse than the excuse itself does; if not, I must stand condemned at the end of my story.—But let me go on.

After a few days of these coy, lady-like compliances on his side, we grew into a more conversible temper: at last I took a proper occasion, and desired he would be so frank

with me as to let me know what was his real dislike, or motive, that made him throw up so good an income as his share with us annually brought him in? For though, by our admission of Booth, it might not probably amount to so much by a hundred or two a-year, as formerly, yet the remainder was too considerable to be quarrelled with, and was likely to continue more than the best actors before us had ever got by the stage. And farther, to encourage him to be open, I told him if I had done any thing that had particularly disoblged him, I was ready, if he could put me in the way, to make him any amends in my power; if not, I desired he would be so just to himself as to let me know the real truth, without reserve; but reserve he could not, from his natural temper, easily shake off. All he said came from him by half sentences and inuendoes, as—No, he had not taken any thing particularly ill—for his part, he was very easy, as he was; but where others were to dispose of his property as they pleased—if you had stood it out, as I did, Booth might have paid a better price for it.—You were too much afraid of the court—but that's all over.—There were other things in the playhouse.—No man of spirit—In short, to be always pestered and provoked by a trifling wasp—a vain—shallow—a man would sooner beg his bread, than bear it.—Here it was easy to understand him: I therefore asked him, what he had to bear that I had not my share of? “No; it was not the same thing,” he said.—“You can play with a bear, or let him alone, and do what he would; but I could not let him lay his paws upon me, without being hurt; you did not feel him, as I did.—And for a man to be cutting of throats, upon every trifle, at my time of day!—If I had been as covetous as he thought me, may be I might have borne it, as well as you—but I would not be a lord of



the treasury, if such a temper as Wilks's were to be at the head of it."

Here, then, the whole secret was out: the rest of our conversation was but explaining upon it. In a word, the painful behaviour of Wilks had hurt him so sorely, that the affair of Booth was looked upon as much a relief as a grievance, in giving him so plausible a pretence to get rid of us all, with a better grace.

Booth, too, in a little time, had his share of the same uneasiness, and often complained of it to me: yet as we neither of us could, then, afford to pay Dogget's price for our remedy, all we could do was to avoid every occasion, in our power, of inflaming the distemper; so that we both agreed, though Wilks's nature was not to be changed, it was a less evil to live with him than without him.

Though I had often suspected, from what I had felt myself, that the temper of Wilks was Dogget's real quarrel to the stage, yet I could never thoroughly believe it, till I had it from his own mouth. And I, then, thought the concern he had shown at it was a good deal inconsistent with that understanding which was generally allowed him. When I give my reasons for it, perhaps the reader will not have a better opinion of my own: be that as it may, I cannot help wondering that he, who was so much more capable of reflection than Wilks, could sacrifice so valuable an income to his impatience of another's natural frailty; and though my stoical way of thinking may be no rule for a wiser man's opinion, yet, if it should happen to be right, the reader may make his use of it. Why then should we not always consider that the rashness of abuse is but the false reason of a weak man, and that offensive terms are only used to supply the want of strength in argument? which, as to the common practice of the sober world, we

do not find every man in business is obliged to resent with a military sense of honour ; or, if he should, would not the conclusion amount to this,—because another wants sense and manners I am obliged to be a madman ? for such every man is, more or less, while the passion of anger is in possession of him. And what less can we call that proud man who would put another out of the world only for putting him out of humour ? If accounts of the tongue were always to be made up with the sword, all the wise men in the world might be brought in debtors to block-heads ; and when honour pretends to be witness, judge, and executioner in its own cause, if honour were a man, would it be an untruth to say honour is a very impudent fellow ? But in Dogget's case it may be asked, How was he to behave himself ? Were passionate insults to be borne for years together ? To these questions I can only answer with two or three more : Was he to punish himself because another was in the wrong ? How many sensible husbands endure the teasing tongue of a forward wife, only because she is the weaker vessel, and why should not a weak man have the same indulgence ? Daily experience will tell us that the fretful temper of a friend, like the personal beauty of a fine lady, by use and cohabitation may be brought down to give us neither pain nor pleasure ; such, at least, and no more was the distress I found myself in upon the same provocations, which I generally returned with humming an air to myself ; or, if the storm grew very high, it might, perhaps, sometimes ruffle me enough to sing a little out of tune. Thus, too, if I had any ill nature to gratify, I often saw the unruly passion of the aggressor's mind punish itself by a restless disorder of the body.

What inclines me, therefore, to think the conduct of

Dogget was as rash as the provocations he complained of, is that, in some time after he had left us, he plainly discovered he had repented it. His acquaintance observed to us that he sent many a long look after his share in the still prosperous state of the stage; but, as his heart was too high to declare (what we saw, too,) his shy inclination to return, he made us no direct overtures. Nor, indeed, did we care (though he was a golden actor) to pay too dear for him: for as most of his parts had been pretty well supplied, he could not, now, be of his former value to us. However, to show the town, at least, that he had not forsworn the stage, he, one day, condescended to play for the benefit of Mrs. Porter,\* in the “*Wanton Wife*,” at which he knew

\* This valuable and respected actress, who was not only an honour to the stage, but an ornament to human nature, obtained the notice of Betterton by performing, when a child, the *Genius of Britain*, in a Lord Mayor's pageant, during the reign of Charles or James the Second. It was the custom for fruit-women in the theatre formerly to stand fronting the pit, with their backs to the stage, and their oranges, &c. covered with vine leaves, under one of which Betterton threatened to put his little pupil, who was extremely diminutive, if she did not speak and act as he would have her.

Mrs. Porter was the genuine successor of Mrs. Barry, and had an elevated consequence in her manner, which has seldom been equalled. One of her greatest parts was Shakspeare's *Queen Catherine*, in which her sensibility and intelligence, her graceful elocution and dignified behaviour, commanded applause and attention in passages of little importance. When the scene was not agitated by passion, to the general spectator she failed in communicating equal pleasure; her recitation of fact or sentiment being so modulated as to resemble musical cadence rather than speaking. Where passion, however, predominated, she exerted her

his late majesty was to be present. Now, though I speak it not of my own knowledge, yet it was not likely Mrs.

powers to a supreme degree, and exhibited that enthusiastic ardour which filled her audience with animation, astonishment, and delight.

The dislocation of her thigh-bone, in the summer of 1731, was attended with a circumstance that deserves to be recorded. She lived at Heywood-hill, near Hendon, and, after the play, went home every night in a one-horse chaise, prepared to defend herself against robbery, with a brace of pistols. She was stopped on one of those occasions by a highwayman, who demanded her money, and having the courage to level one of her pistols at him, the assailant, who was probably unfurnished with a similar weapon, assured her that he was no common thief, and had been driven to his present course by the wants of a starving family. He told her, at the same time, where he lived, and urged his distresses with such earnestness, that she spared him all the money in her purse, which was about ten guineas. The man left her, on which she gave a lash to the horse, who suddenly started out of the track, overturned her vehicle, and caused the accident already related. Let it be remembered to this good woman's credit, that notwithstanding the pain and loss to which he had, innocently, subjected her, she made strict inquiry into the highwayman's character, and finding that he had told the truth, she raised about sixty pounds among her acquaintance, and sent it, without delay, to the relief of his wretched family. There is a romantic generosity in this deed that captivates me more than its absolute justice.

About the year 1738, Mrs. Porter returned to the stage, and acted many of her principal characters, with much vigour and great applause, though labouring under advanced age and unconquerable infirmity. She had the misfortune to outlive an annuity upon which she depended, and died in narrow circumstances, about the year 1762.

Porter would have asked that favour of him without some previous hint that it would be granted. His coming among us, for that day only, had a strong appearance of his laying it in our way to make him proposals, or that he hoped the court or town, might intimate to us their desire of seeing him oftener : but as he acted only to do a particular favour, the managers owed him no compliment for it, beyond common civilities, and, as that might not be all he proposed by it, his farther views (if he had any) came to nothing ; for, after this attempt, he never returned to the stage. To speak of him as an actor, he was the most an original, and the strictest observer of nature, of all his contemporaries. He borrowed from none of them : his manner was his own : he was a pattern to others, whose greatest merit was that they had sometimes tolerably imitated him. In dressing a character to the greatest exactness he was remarkably skilful ; the least article of whatever habit he wore, seemed in some degree to speak and mark the different humour he presented ; a necessary care in a comedian, in which many have been too remiss or ignorant. He could be extremely ridiculous, without stepping into the least impropriety to make him so. His greatest success was in characters of lower life, which he improved, from the delight he took in his observations

Though her voice was harsh and displeasing, she surmounted its defects by her exquisite judgment. In person she was tall and well shaped ; her complexion was fair ; and her features, though not handsome, were made susceptible of all that strong feeling could desire to convey. Her deportment was easy, and her action unaffected ; and the testimony upon which the merits of Mrs. Porter are placed, entitles us to rank her in the very first class of theatrical performers.

of that kind in the real world. In songs,\* and particular dances, too, of humour, he had no competitor. Congreve was a great admirer of him, and found his account in the characters he expressly wrote for him. In those of *Fondlewife*, in his "Old Bachelor," and *Ben*, in "Love for Love," no author and actor could be more obliged to their mutual masterly performances. He was very acceptable to several persons of high rank and taste, though he seldom cared to be the comedian, but among his more intimate acquaintance.

And now let me ask the world a question. When men have any valuable qualities, why are the generality of our modern wits so fond of exposing their failings only, which the wisest of mankind will never wholly be free from? Is it of more use to the public to know their errors than their perfections? Why is the account of life to be so unequally stated? Though a man may be sometimes debtor to sense or morality, is it not doing him wrong not to let the world see, at the same time, how far he may be creditor to both? Are defects and disproportions to be the only laboured features in a portrait? But perhaps such authors may know how to please the world better than I do, and may naturally suppose that what is delightful to themselves may not be disagreeable to others. For my own part, I confess myself a little touched in conscience, at what I have just now observed to the disadvantage of my other brother manager.

If, therefore, in discovering the true cause of the public's losing so valuable an actor as *Dogget*, I have been obliged to show the temper of Wilks in its natural complexion,

\* *Dogget* sang between the acts, the night our first Italian opera was produced upon the English stage.

ought I not, in amends, and balance of his imperfections, to say at the same time of him that if he was not the most correct or judicious, yet as *Hamlet* says of the king his father, "Take him for all in all," &c., he was certainly the most diligent, most laborious, and most useful actor that I have seen upon the stage in fifty years.

## CHAP. XV.

*Sir Richard Steele succeeds Collier in the theatre royal.—Lincoln's Inn Fields house rebuilt.—The patent restored.—Eight actors at once desert from the King's company.—Why.—A new patent obtained by Sir Richard Steele, and assigned in shares to the managing actors of Drury-lane.—Of modern pantomimes.—The rise of them.—Vanity invincible, and ashamed.—The "Non-juror" acted.—The author not forgiven, and rewarded for it.*

UPON the death of the queen, plays, as they always had been on the like occasions, were silenced for six weeks, but this happening on the first of August, in the long vacation of the theatre, the observance of that ceremony, which, at another juncture, would have fallen like wet weather upon their harvest, did them now no particular damage. Their license, however, being of course to be renewed, that vacation gave the managers time to cast about for the better alteration of it : and since they knew the pension of seven hundred a-year, which had been levied upon them for Collier, must still be paid to somebody, they imagined the merit of a whig might now have as good a chance for getting into it, as that of a tory had for being continued in it. Having no obligations, therefore, to Collier, who had made the last penny of them, they applied themselves to Sir Richard Steele, who had distinguished himself, by his zeal for the house of Hanover, and had been expelled the House of Commons, for carrying it, as was judged at a certain crisis, into a reproach of the government. This we



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knew was his pretension to that favour in which he now stood at court. We knew, too, the obligations the stage had to his writings, there being scarcely a comedian of merit in our whole company whom his "Tattlers" had not made better, by his public recommendation of them, and many days had our house been particularly filled by the influence and credit of his pen. Obligations of this kind from a gentleman with whom they all had the pleasure of a personal intimacy, the managers thought could not be more justly returned, than by showing him some warm instance of their desire to have him at the head of them. We therefore begged him to use his interest for the renewal of our license, and that he would do us the honour of getting our names to stand with his in the same commission. This, we told him, would put it still farther into his power of supporting the stage in that reputation to which his lucubrations had already so much contributed; and that, therefore, we thought no man had better pretences to partake of its success.

Though it may be no addition to the favourable part of this gentleman's character, to say with what pleasure he received this mark of our inclination to him, yet my vanity longs to tell you that it surprised him into an acknowledgment that people who are shy of obligations are cautious of confessing. His spirits took such a lively turn upon it, that had we been all his own sons, no unexpected act of filial duty could have more endeared us to him.

It must be observed, then, that as Collier had no share in any part of our property, no difficulties from that quarter could obstruct this proposal. And the usual time of our beginning to act for the winter season, now drawing near,\* we pressed him not to lose any time in his

\* The season began, I believe, early in November, and ended about the middle of June.

solicitation of this new license. Accordingly Sir Richard applied himself to the Duke of Marlborough, the hero of his heart, who, upon the first mention of it, obtained it of his majesty, for Sir Richard and the former managers, who were actors. Collier we heard no more of.

The court and town being crowded very early in the winter season, upon the critical turn of affairs so much expected from the Hanover succession, the theatre had its particular share of that general blessing, by a more than ordinary concourse of spectators.

About this time the patentee, having very nearly finished his house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, began to think of forming a new company; and, in the meantime, found it necessary to apply for leave to employ them. By the weak defence he had always made against the several attacks upon his interest and former government of the theatre, it might be a question, if his house had been ready, in the queen's time, whether he would, then, have had the spirit to ask, or interest enough to obtain leave to use it. But in the following reign, as it did not appear he had done anything to forfeit the right of his patent, he prevailed with Mr. Craggs the younger, afterwards secretary of state, to lay his case before the king, which he did in so effectual a manner, that, as Mr. Craggs himself told me, his majesty was pleased to say upon it, "That he remembered, when he had been in England before, in King Charles's time, there had been two theatres in London, and as the patent seemed to be a lawful grant, he saw no reason why two playhouses might not be continued."

The suspension of the patent being thus taken off, the younger multitude seemed to call aloud for two playhouses. Many desired another, from the common notion that *two* would always create emulation in the actors, an opinion which I have considered in a former chapter. Others, too,

were as eager for them, from the natural ill-will that follows the fortunate or prosperous in any undertaking. Of this low malevolence we had, now and then, had remarkable instances; we had been forced to dismiss an audience of a hundred and fifty pounds, from a disturbance spirited up by obscure people, who never gave any better reason for it, than that it was their fancy to support the idle complaint of one rival actress against another, in their several pretensions to the chief part in a new tragedy. But as this tumult seemed only to be the wantonness of English liberty, I shall not presume to lay any farther censure upon it.

Now, notwithstanding this public desire of re-establishing two houses; and though I have allowed the former actors greatly our superiors; and the managers I am speaking of not to have been without their private errors; yet, under all these disadvantages, it is certain the stage, for twenty years before this time, had never been in so flourishing a condition: and it was as evident, to all sensible spectators, that this prosperity could be only owing to that better order and closer industry, now daily observed, and which had formerly been neglected by our predecessors. But that I may not impose upon the reader a merit which was not generally allowed us, I ought honestly to let him know that, about this time, the public papers, particularly "Mist's Journal," took upon them very often to censure our management with the same freedom and severity as if we had been so many ministers of state. But so it happened that these unfortunate reformers of the world, these self-appointed censors, hardly ever hit upon what was really wrong in us; but, taking up facts upon trust or hearsay, piled up many a pompous paragraph that they had ingeniously conceived was sufficient to demolish our administration, or, at least, to make us very uneasy in it; which, indeed, had so far its effect, that my equally-injured

brethren, Wilks and Booth, often complained to me of these disagreeable aspersions, and proposed that some public answer might be made to them, which I always opposed, by, perhaps, too secure a contempt of what such writers could do to hurt us; and my reason for it was, that I knew but of one way to silence authors of that stamp, which was, to grow insignificant and good-for-nothing, and then we should hear no more of them.\* But while we continued in the prosperity of pleasing others, and were not conscious of having deserved what they said of us, why should we gratify the little spleen of our enemies, by winning at it, or give them fresh opportunities to dine upon any reply they might make to our publicly taking notice of them? And though silence might, in some cases, be a sign of guilt or error confessed, our accusers were so low in their credit and sense, that the content we gave the public, almost every day, from the stage, ought to be our only answer to them.

However, as I have observed, we made many blots, which these unskilful gamesters never hit. But the fidelity of an historian cannot be excused the omission of any truth which might make for the other side of the question. I shall therefore confess a fact which, if a happy accident had not intervened, had brought our affairs into a very tottering condition. This, too, is that fact which, in a former chapter, I promised to set forth as a sea-mark of danger to future managers, in their theatrical course of government.

\* Mr. Cibber sometimes lost this desirable equanimity, and was once so far transported by passion, as to publish the following advertisement in the "Daily Post."

Ten Pounds will be paid by Mr. Cibber, of the theatre royal, to any person who shall (by a legal proof) discover the author of a pamphlet, intituled "The Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar," &c.

When the new-built theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields was ready to be opened, seven or eight actors, in one day, deserted from us to the service of the enemy, which obliged us to postpone many of our best plays, for want of some inferior part in them, which these deserters had been used to fill. But the indulgence of the royal family, who then frequently honoured us by their presence, was pleased to accept of whatever could be hastily got ready for their entertainment. And though this critical good fortune prevented, in some measure, our audiences falling so low as otherwise they might have done, yet it was not sufficient to keep us in our former prosperity : for that year our profits amounted not to above a third part of our usual dividends, though in the following year we entirely recovered them. The chief of these deserters were Keen, Bullock, Pack,\* Leigh,† son of the famous Tony Leigh, and others of less note. 'Tis true, they none of them had more than a negative merit, in being only able to do us more harm by their leaving us, without notice, than they could do us good by remaining with us ; for though the best of them could not support a play, the worst of them, by their absence, could maim it ; as the loss of the least pin in a watch may obstruct its motion. But, to come to

\* Pack was so excellent an actor, that he played *Marplot*, *Beau Mizen*, and many other leading parts, at the production of those pieces in which they are comprised. He came upon the stage, when very young, as a singer, having received his instructions in the vocal art from Leveridge, and left it in the meridian of life, to keep the Globe tavern, Charing-cross, just opposite the Hay-market, where he died, but at what time I cannot even conjecture.

† This actor is not to be confounded with John Leigh, who also belonged to the Lincoln's-inn-fields company.

the true cause of their desertion. After my having discovered the (long-unknown) occasion that drove Dogget from the stage, before his settled inclination to leave it, it will be less incredible that these actors, upon the first opportunity to relieve themselves, should all, in one day, have left us from the same cause of uneasiness. For, in a little time after, upon not finding their expectations answered in Lincoln's Inn Fields, some of them, who seemed to answer for the rest, told me the greatest grievance they had in our company was the shocking temper of Wilks, who, upon every almost no occasion, let loose the unlimited language of passion upon them, in such a manner as their patience was not longer able to support. This, indeed, was what we could not justify. This was a secret, that might have made a wholesome paragraph in a critical newspaper; but as it was our good fortune that it came not to the ears of our enemies, the town was not entertained with their public remarks upon it.

After this new theatre had enjoyed that short run of favour which is apt to follow novelty, their audiences began to flag: but whatever good opinion we had of our own merit, we had not so good a one of the multitude as to depend too much upon the delicacy of their taste. We knew, too, that this company, being so much nearer to the city than we were, would intercept many an honest customer, that might not know a good market from a bad one; and that the thinnest of their audiences must be always taking something from the measure of our profits. All these disadvantages, with many others, we were forced to lay before Sir Richard Steele, and farther to remonstrate to him that, as he now stood in Collier's place, his pension of seven hundred pounds was liable to the same conditions that Collier had received it upon, which were that it should be only payable during our being the only company permitted



to act, but in case another should be set up against us, that then this pension was to be liquidated into an equal share with us, and which we now hoped he would be contented with. While we were offering to proceed, Sir Richard stopped us short, by assuring us that, as he came among us by our own invitation, he should always think himself obliged to come into any measures for our ease and service ; that to be a burthen to our industry would be more disagreeable to him than it could be to us ; and as he had always taken a delight in his endeavours for our prosperity, he should be still ready, on our own terms, to continue them. Every one who knew Sir Richard Steele in his prosperity, before the effects of his goodnature had brought him to distresses, knew that this was his manner of dealing with his friends in business. Another instance of the same nature will immediately fall in my way.

When we proposed to put this agreement into writing, he desired us not to hurry ourselves ; for that he was advised, upon the late desertion of our actors, to get our license (which only subsisted during pleasure) enlarged into a more ample and durable authority, and which he said he had reason to think would be more easily obtained, if we were willing that a patent for the same purpose might be granted to him, only, for his life and three years after, which he would then assign over to us. This was a prospect beyond our hopes, and what we had long wished for ; for though I cannot say we had ever reason to grieve at the personal severities or behaviour of any one Lord Chamberlain, in my time, yet the several officers under them who had not the hearts of noblemen, often treated us, to use Shakespeare's expression, with all the " insolence of office " that narrow minds are apt to be elated with ; but a patent, we knew, would free us from so abject a state of dependency. Accordingly, we desired Sir Richard to lose no time ; he

was immediately promised it: in the interim, we sounded the inclination of the actors remaining with us, who had all sense enough to know that the credit and reputation we stood in with the town, could not but be a better security for their salaries than the promise of any other stage, put into bonds, could make good to them. In a few days after, Sir Richard told us that his majesty, being apprised that others had a joint power with him in the license, it was expected we should, under our hands, signify that his petition for a patent was preferred by the consent of us all. Such an acknowledgment was immediately signed, and the patent thereupon passed the great seal; for which, I remember, the Lord Chancellor Cowper, in compliment to Sir Richard, would receive no fee.

We received the patent January 19, 1718, and Sir Richard being obliged the next morning to set out for Boroughbridge; in Yorkshire, where he was soon after elected member of parliament, we were forced that very night to draw up in a hurry, till our counsel might more advisably perfect it, his assignment to us of equal shares in the patent, with farther conditions of partnership: but here I ought to take shame to myself, and at the same time to give this second instance of the equity and honour of Sir Richard; for this assignment, which I had myself the hasty penning of, was so worded, that it gave Sir Richard as equal a title to our property as it had given us to his authority in the patent: but Sir Richard, notwithstanding, when he returned to town, took no advantage of the mistake, and consented, in our second agreement, to pay us twelve hundred pounds, to be equally intitled to our property, which, at his death, we were obliged to repay (as we afterwards did) to his executors; and which, in case any of us had died before him, the survivors were equally obliged to have paid to the executor of such deceased person, upon the same account.

But Sir Richard's moderation with us was rewarded with the reverse of Collier's stiffness: Collier, by insisting on his pension, lost three hundred pounds a-year; and Sir Richard, by his accepting a share in lieu of it, was, one year with another, as much a gainer.

The grant of this patent having assured us of a competent term to be relied on, we were now emboldened to lay out larger sums in the decorations of our plays: upon the revival of Dryden's "All for Love,"\* the habits of that tragedy amounted to an expense of nearly six hundred pounds; a sum unheard of, for many years before, on the like occasions. But we thought such extraordinary marks of our acknowledgment were due to the favours which the public were now again pouring in upon us. About this time we were so much in fashion and followed, that our enemies (who they were it would not be fair to guess, for we never knew them) made their push of a good round lie upon us, to terrify those auditors from our support whom they could not mislead by their private arts or public invectives. A current report that the walls and roof of our house were liable to fall had got such ground in the town that, on a sudden, we found our audiences unusually decreased by it. Wilks was imme-

\* It was the production of this play, in preference to his alteration of Shakspeare's "Coriolanus," which so bitterly incensed Dennis, and occasioned his subsequent animosity against Cibber. The vindictive old critic thus enlarges upon this revival in a letter to Steele:

Well, sir, when the winter came on, what was done by your deputies? Why, instead of keeping their word with me, they spent above two months of the season in getting up "All for Love; or, the World well Lost," a play which has indeed a noble first act, an act which ends with a scene becoming of the dignity of the tragic stage. But if Horace had been now alive, and been either a reader or spectator of that entertainment, he would have passed his old sentence upon the author;

'Infelix opera summa, quæ ponere totum  
Nesciet.'

diately for denouncing war and vengeance on the author of this falsehood, and for offering a reward to whoever could discover him. But it was thought more necessary first to disprove the falsehood, and then to pay what compliments might be thought advisable to the author. Accordingly, an order from the king was obtained to have our tenement surveyed by Sir Thomas Hewett, then the proper officer, whose report of its being in a safe and sound condition, and signed by him, was published in every newspaper.\* This had so immediate an effect, that our spectators, whose apprehensions had lately kept them absent, now made up our losses, by returning to us with a fresh inclination, and in greater numbers.

When it was first publicly known that the new theatre would be opened against us, I cannot help going a little back to remember the concern that my brother managers

\* This report from Sir Thomas Hewett, surveyor of his majesty's works, to his grace the Duke of Newcastle, lord-chamberlain, of his majesty's household, is as followeth :

MY LORD,

Scotland-yard, Jan. 21, 1721.

In obedience to his majesty's commands, signified to me by your grace on the 18th instant, I have surveyed the playhouse in Drury-lane, and took with me Mr. Ripley, commissioner of his majesty's Board of Works, the master bricklayer, and carpenter. We examined all its parts with the greatest exactness we could ; and found the walls, roofing, stage, pit, boxes, galleries, machinery, scenes, &c. sound, and almost as good as when first built ; neither decayed, nor in the least danger of falling ; and when some small repairs are made, and an useless stack of chimneys (built by the late Mr. Rich) taken down, the building may continue for a long time, being firm, the materials and joints good, and no part giving way ; and capable to bear much greater weight than is put on them.

My Lord Duke,

Your Grace's most humble and obedient servant,

THOMAS HEWETT.

N. B. The stack of chimneys mentioned in this report (which were placed over the stone passage leading to the boxes) are actually taken down.

expressed at what might be the consequences of it. They imagined that now all those who wished ill to us, and particularly a great party who had been disobliged by our shutting them out from behind our scenes, even to the refusal of their money, would now exert themselves in any partial or extravagant measures that might either hurt us or support our competitors: these, too, were some of those farther reasons which had discouraged them from running the hazard of continuing to Sir Richard Steele the same pension which had been paid to Collier, upon all which I observed to them that, for my own part, I had not the same apprehensions; but that I foresaw as many good as bad consequences from two houses: that though the novelty might possibly at first abate a little of our profits, yet, if we slackened not our industry, that loss would be amply balanced by an equal increase of our ease, and quiet: that those turbulent spirits which were always molesting us, would now have other employment; that the questioned merit of our acting would now stand in a clearer light, when others were fairly compared to us; that though faults might be found with the best actors that ever were, yet the egregious defects that would appear in others would now be the effectual means to make our superiority shine, if we had any pretence to it; and that what some people hoped might ruin us, would in the end reduce them to give up the dispute, and reconcile them to those who could best entertain them.

In every article of this opinion they afterwards found I had not been deceived; and the truth of it may be so well remembered by many living spectators, that it would be too frivolous and needless a boast to give it any further observation.

But, in what I have said, I would not be understood to be an advocate for two playhouses; for we shall soon find

that two sets of actors, tolerated in the same place, have constantly ended in the corruption of the theatre, of which the auxiliary entertainments that have so barbarously supplied the defects of weak action, have, for some years past, been a flagrant instance ; it may not, therefore, be here improper to show how our childish pantomimes first came to take so gross a possession of the stage.

I have, upon several occasions, already observed that when one company is too hard for another, the lower in reputation has always been forced to exhibit some new-fangled foppery, to draw the multitude after them : of these expedients, singing and dancing had formerly been the most effectual ;\* but, at the time I am speaking of, our English music had been so discountenanced, since the taste of Italian operas prevailed, that it was to no purpose to pretend to it. Dancing, therefore, was now the only weight in the opposite scale, and as the new theatre sometimes found their account in it, it could not be safe for us wholly to neglect it. To give even dancing, therefore, some improvement, and to make it something more than motion without meaning, the fable of Mars and Venus was formed into a connected presentation of dances in character, wherein the passions were so happily expressed, and the whole story so intelligibly told, by a mute narration of gesture only, that even thinking spectators allowed it both a pleasing and a rational entertainment ; though, at the same time, from our distrust of its reception, we durst not venture to decorate it with any extraordinary expense of scenes or habits ; but upon the success of this attempt, it was rightly concluded, that if a visible expense in both were

\* Entertainments of singing and dancing were first introduced by D'Avenant, to check the superiority enjoyed by the royal comedians in their exhibition of the regular drama.

added to something of the same nature, it could not fail of drawing the town proportionably after it. From this original hint, then, but every way unequal to it, sprung forth that succession of monstrous medleys that have so long infested the stage, and which arose upon one another alternately at both houses, outvying in expense, like contending bribes on both sides at an election, to secure a majority of the multitude. But so it is, truth may complain, and merit murmur, with what justice it may, the few will never be a match for the many, unless authority shall think fit to interpose, and put down these poetical drams, these gin-shops of the stage, that intoxicate its auditors, and dishonour their understanding with a levity for which I want a name.

If I am asked, after my condemning these fooleries, myself, how I came to assent, or continue my share of expense to them, I have no better excuse for my error than confessing it. I did it against my conscience; and had not virtue enough to starve, by opposing a multitude that would have been too hard for me. Now let me ask an odd question. Had Henry the Fourth of France a better excuse for changing his religion? I was still in my heart, as much as he could be, on the side of truth and sense, but with this difference, that I had their leave to quit them when they could not support me. For what equivalent could I have found for my falling a martyr to them? How far the hero or the comedian was in the wrong, let the clergy and the critics decide. Necessity will be as good a plea for the one as the other. But let the question go which way it will, Henry the Fourth has always been allowed a great man; and what I want of his grandeur, you see by the inference, nature has amply supplied to me, in vanity; a pleasure which neither the pertness of wit nor the gravity of wisdom will ever persuade me to part with. And why is there not as much honesty in owning as in concealing it?

For though to hide it may be wisdom, to be without it is impossible; and where is the merit of keeping a secret which every body is let into? To say we have no vanity, then, is showing a great deal of it; as to say we have a great deal cannot be showing so much: and though there may be art in a man's accusing himself, even then it will be more pardonable than self-commendation. Do not we find that even good actions have their share of it; that it is as inseparable from our being as our nakedness? And, though it may be equally decent to cover it, yet the wisest man can no more be without it, than the weakest can believe he was born in his clothes. If then what we say of ourselves be true, and not prejudicial to others, to be called vain upon it is no more a reproach than to be called a brown or a fair man. Vanity is of all complexions; 'tis the growth of every clime and capacity; authors of all ages have had a tincture of it, and yet you read Horace, Montaigne, and Sir William Temple with pleasure. Nor am I sure, if it were curable by precept, that mankind would be mended by it. Could vanity be eradicated from our nature, I am afraid that the reward of most human virtues would not be found in this world; and happy is he who has no greater sin to answer for in the next.

But what is all this to the theatrical follies I was talking of? Perhaps not a great deal; but it is to my purpose; for, though I am an historian, I do not write to the wise and learned only; I hope to have readers of no more judgment than some of my *quondam* auditors; and I am afraid they will be as hardly contented with dry matters of fact, as with a plain play without entertainments: this rhapsody, therefore, has been thrown in, as a dance between the acts, to make up for the dulness of what would have been by itself only proper. But I now come to my story again.

Notwithstanding, then, this our compliance with the vul-



gar taste, we generally made use of these pantomimes but as crutches to our weakest plays. Nor were we so lost to all sense of what was valuable, as to dishonour our best authors in such bad company. We had still a due respect to several select plays that were able to be their own support ; and in which we found our constant account, without painting and patching them out, like prostitutes, with these follies in fashion : if, therefore, we were not so strictly chaste in the other part of our conduct, let the error of it stand among the silly consequences of two stages. Could the interests of both companies have been united in one only theatre, I had been one of the few that would have used my utmost endeavour of never admitting to the stage any spectacle that ought not to have been seen there ; the errors of my own plays, which I could not see, excepted. And though, probably, the majority of spectators would not have been so well pleased with a theatre so regulated, yet sense and reason cannot lose their intrinsic value, because the giddy and the ignorant are blind and deaf, or numerous ; and I cannot help saying, it is a reproach to a sensible people to let folly so publicly govern their pleasures.

While I am making this grave declaration of what I would have done, had one only stage been continued, to obtain an easier belief of my sincerity I ought to put my reader in mind of what I did do, even after two companies were again established.

About this time\* jacobitism had lately exerted itself, by the most unprovoked rebellion that our histories have handed down to us since the Norman conquest : I therefore thought that to set the authors and principles of that desperate folly in a fair light, by allowing the mistaken consciences of some their best excuse, and by making

the artful pretenders to conscience as ridiculous as they were ungratefully wicked, was a subject fit for the honest satire of comedy, and what might, if it succeeded, do honour to the stage, by showing the valuable use of it. And considering what numbers, at that time, might come to it, as prejudiced spectators, it may be allowed that the undertaking was not less hazardous than laudable.

● To give life, therefore, to this design, I borrowed the "Tartuffe" of Moliere, and turned him into a modern nonjuror: upon the hypocrisy of the French character I ingrafted a stronger wickedness; that of an English popish priest, lurking under the doctrine of our own church to raise his fortune upon the ruin of a worthy gentleman, whom his dissembled sanctity had seduced into the treasonable cause of a Roman catholic outlaw. How this design, in the play, was executed, I refer to the readers of it; it cannot be mended by any critical remarks I can make in its favour: let it speak for itself. All the reason I had to think it no bad performance was that, it was acted eighteen days running, and that the party that were hurt by it, as I have been told, have not been the smallest number of my back friends ever since. But happy was it for this play that the very subject was its protection; a few smiles of silent contempt were the utmost disgrace that, on the first day of its appearance, it was thought safe to throw upon it; as the satire was chiefly employed on the enemies of the government, they were not so hardy as to own themselves such, by any higher disapprobation or resentment. But as it was then probable I might write again, they knew it would not be long before they might with more security give a loose to their spleen, and make up accounts with me. And, to do them justice, in every play I afterwards produced they paid me the balance, to a tittle. But to none was I more beholden than that celebrated author

Mr. Mist, whose "Weekly Journal," for about fifteen years following, scarcely ever failed of passing some of his party compliments upon me: the state and the stage were his frequent parallels; and the minister and Mynheer Keiber, the manager, were as constantly drolled upon: now, for my own part, though I could never persuade my wit to have an open account with him, for, as he had no effects of his own, I did not think myself obliged to answer his bills; notwithstanding, I will be so charitable to his real manes, and to the ashes of his paper, as to mention one particular civility he paid to my memory, after he thought he had ingeniously killed me. Soon after the "Nonjuror" had received the favour of the town, I read in one of his journals the following short paragraph, *vis*: "Yesterday died Mr. Colley Cibber, late comedian of the theatre royal, notorious for writing the 'Nonjuror.'" The compliment in the latter part, I confess, I did not dislike, because it came from so impartial a judge; and it really so happened that the former part of it was very near being true, for I had that very day just crawled out, after having been some weeks laid up by a fever: however, I saw no use in being thought to be thoroughly dead before my time, and therefore had a mind to see whether the town cared to have me alive again: so the play of the "Orphan" being to be acted that day, I quietly stole myself into the part of the *Chaplain*, which I had not been seen in for many years before. The surprise of the audience at my unexpected appearance on the very day I had been dead in the news, and the paleness of my looks, seemed to make it a doubt whether I was not the ghost of my real self departed: but when I spoke, their wonder eased itself by an applause which convinced me they were then satisfied that my friend Mist had told a fib of me. Now, if simply to have shown myself in broad life, and about my

business, after he had notoriously reported me dead, can be called a reply, it was the only one which his paper, while alive, ever drew from me. How far I may be vain, then, in supposing that this play brought me into the disfavor of so many wits and valiant auditors as afterwards appeared against me, let those who may think it worth their notice judge. In the meantime, till I can find a better excuse for their sometimes particular treatment of me, I cannot easily give up my suspicion : and if I add a more remarkable fact that afterwards confirmed me in it, perhaps, it may incline others to join in my opinion :

On the first day of the "Provoked Husband," ten years after the "Nonjuror" had appeared, a powerful party, not having the fear of public offence or private injury before their eyes, appeared most impetuously concerned for the demolition of it ; in which they so far succeeded, that for some time I gave it up for lost ; and, to follow their blows, in the public papers of the next day it was attacked, and triumphed over, as a dead and damned piece ; a swinging criticism was made upon it, in general invective terms, for they disdained to trouble the world with particulars ; their sentence, it seems, was proof enough of its deserving the fate it had met with. But this damned play was, notwithstanding, acted twenty-eight nights together, and left off at a receipt of upwards of a hundred and forty pounds ; which happened to be more than in fifty years before could be then said of any one play, whatsoever.

Now if such notable behaviour could break out upon so successful a play, which, too, upon the share Sir John Vanbrugh had in it, I will venture to call a good one, what shall we impute it to ? Why may not I plainly say it was not the play, but me who had a hand in it, they did not like ? And for what reason ? If they were not ashamed of it, why did not they publish it ? No, the reason had

published itself,—I was the author of the “Nonjuror.” But, perhaps, of all authors, I ought not to make this sort of complaint, because I have reason to think that that particular offence has made me more honourable friends than enemies; the latter of which I am not unwilling should know, however unequal the merit may be to the reward, that part of the bread I now eat was given me for having written the “Nonjuror.”\*

And yet I cannot but lament, with many quiet spectators, the helpless misfortune that has so many years attended the stage; that no law has had force enough to give it absolute protection: for till we can civilise its auditors, the authors that write for it will seldom have a greater call to it than necessity; and how unlikely is the imagination of the needy to inform or delight the many in affluence, or how often does necessity make many unhappy gentlemen turn authors, in spite of nature! What a blessing, therefore, is it, what an enjoyed deliverance, after a wretch has been driven by fortune to stand so many wanton buffets of unmanly fierceness, to find himself, at last, quietly lifted above the reach of them! But let not this reflection fall upon my auditors, without distinction; for though candour and benevolence are silent virtues, they are as visible as the most vociferous ill-nature; and I confess the public has given me more frequent reason to be thankful than to complain.

\* So popular was this play, that Lintot gave an hundred guineas for the copyright of it, though Rowe's tragedies of “Jane Shore,” and “Lady Jane Gray,” only a few years previous to this purchase, had jointly produced but one hundred and twenty-two pounds.

## CHAP. XVI.

*The author steps out of the way.—Pleads his theatrical cause, in Chancery.—Carries it.—Plays acted at Hampton-court.—Theatrical anecdotes in former reigns.—Ministers and managers always censured.—The difficulty of supplying the stage with good actors, considered.—Courtiers, and comedians governed by the same passions.—Examples of both.—The author quits the stage.—Why.*

HAVING brought the government of the stage, through such various changes and revolutions, to this settled state, in which it continued to almost the time of my leaving it, it cannot be supposed that a period of so much quiet, and so long a train of success, though happy for those who enjoyed it, can afford such matter of surprise or amusement as might arise from times of more distress and disorder. A quiet time in history, like a calm in a voyage, leaves us but in an indolent station : to talk of our affairs, when they were no longer ruffled by misfortunes, would be a picture without shade, a flat performance at best. As I might, therefore, throw all that tedious time of our tranquillity into one chasm in my history, and cut my way short, at once, to my last exit from the stage, I shall, at least, fill it up with such matter, only, as I have a mind should be known, how few soever may have patience to read it : yet, as I despair not of some readers, who may be most awake when they think others have most occasion to sleep ; who may be more pleased to find me languid than lively, or in the wrong than in the right ; why should I scruple, when it is so easy a

matter, too, to gratify their particular taste, by venturing upon any error that I like, or the weakness of my judgment misleads me to commit? I think, too, I have a very good chance for my success in this passive ambition, by showing myself in a light I have not been seen in.

By your leave, then, gentlemen : let the scene open, and at once discover your comedian, at the bar. There you will find him a defendant, and pleading his own theatrical cause in a court of Chancery : but as I chuse to have a chance of pleasing others as well as indulging you, gentlemen, I must first beg leave to open my case to them ; after which, my whole speech, upon that occasion, shall be at your mercy.

In all the transactions of life, there cannot be a more painful circumstance, than a dispute at law with a man with whom we have long lived in an agreeable amity : but when Sir Richard Steele, to get himself out of difficulties, was obliged to throw his affairs into the hands of lawyers and trustees, that consideration, then, could be of no weight : the friend, or the gentleman, had no more to do in the matter. Thus, while Sir Richard no longer acted from himself, it may be no wonder if a flaw was found in our conduct, for the law to make work with. It must be observed, then, that about two or three years before this suit was commenced, upon Sir Richard's totally absenting himself from all care and management of the stage, which, by our articles of partnership, he was equally and jointly obliged with us to attend, we were reduced to let him know that we could not go on at that rate ; but that if he expected to make the business a sinecure, we had as much reason to expect a consideration for our extraordinary care of it ; and that during his absence we therefore intended to charge our selves at a salary of 1*l*. 13*s*. 4*d*. every acting day, unless he could show us cause to the contrary, for our manage-

ment: to which, in his composed manner, he only answered that, to be sure, we knew what was fitter to be done than he did; that he had always taken a delight in making us easy, and had no reason to doubt of our doing him justice. Now whether, under this easy style of approbation, he concealed any dislike of our resolution I cannot say; but, if I may speak my private opinion, I really believe, from his natural negligence of his affairs, he was glad, at any rate, to be excused an attendance which he was now grown weary of. But whether I am deceived or right in my opinion, the fact was truly this, that he never once, directly nor indirectly, complained or objected to our being paid the above-mentioned daily sum, in near three years together; and yet still continued to absent himself from us and our affairs. But, notwithstanding, he had seen and done all this with his eyes open, his lawyer thought here was still a fair field for a battle in Chancery, in which, though his client might be beaten, he was sure his bill must be paid for it: accordingly, to work with us he went. But not to be so long as the lawyers were in bringing this cause to an issue, I shall, at once, let you know that it came to a hearing before the late Sir Joseph Jekyll, then master of the rolls, in the year 1726. Now, as the chief point in dispute was of what kind or importance the business of a manager was, or in what it principally consisted, it could not be supposed that the most learned counsel could be so well apprised of the nature of it as one who had himself gone through the care and fatigue of it. I was therefore encouraged by our counsel to speak to that particular head myself: which, I confess, I was glad he suffered me to undertake; but when I tell you that two of the learned counsel against us came afterwards to be successively Lord Chancellors, it sets my presumption in a light that I still tremble to show it in: but, however, not to assume more merit from its success than was really



its due, I ought fairly to let you know that I was not so hardy as to deliver my pleading without notes in my hand of the heads I intended to enlarge upon; for though I thought I could conquer my fear, I could not be so sure of my memory: but when it came to the critical moment, the dread and apprehension of what I had undertaken so disconcerted my courage, that though I had been used to talk to above fifty thousand different people every winter, for upwards of thirty years together, an involuntary and unaffected proof of my confusion fell from my eyes; and, as I found myself quite out of my element, I seemed rather gasping for life than in a condition to cope with the eminent orators against me. But, however, I soon found from the favourable attention of my hearers, that my diffidence had done me no disservice: and as the truth I was to speak to needed no ornament of words, I delivered it in the plain manner following; *viz*:

In this cause, sir, I humbly conceive there are but two points that admit of any material dispute. The first is whether Sir Richard Steele is as much obliged to do the duty and business of a manager as either Wilks, Booth, or Cibber: and the second is whether by Sir Richard's totally withdrawing himself from the business of a manager, the defendants are justifiable in charging to each of themselves the *£1. 13s. 4d. per diem*, for their particular pains and care in carrying on the whole affairs of the stage, without any assistance from Sir Richard Steele.

As to the first, if I do not mistake the words of the assignment, there is a clause in it that says all matters relating to the government or management of the theatre shall be concluded by a majority of voices. Now, I presume, sir, there is no room left to allege that Sir Richard was ever refused his voice, though, in above three years, he never desired to give it: and I believe there will be as little room to say that he could have a voice, if he were not a manager. But, sir, his being a manager is so self-evident, that

it is amazing how he could conceive that he was to take the profits and advantages of a manager, without doing the duty of it. And I will be bold to say, sir, that his assignment of the patent to Wilks, Booth, and Cibber, in no one part of it, by the severest construction in the world, can be wrested to throw the heavy burden of the management only upon their shoulders. Nor does it appear, sir, that, either in his bill or in his answer to our cross-bill, he has offered any hint or glimpse of a reason for his withdrawing from the management at all, or so much as pretend, from the time complained of, that he ever took the least part of his share of it. Now, sir, however unaccountable this conduct of Sir Richard may seem, we will still allow that he had some cause for it; but whether or no that cause was a reasonable one, your honour will the better judge, if I may be indulged in the liberty of explaining it.

Sir, the case, in plain truth and reality, stands thus: Sir Richard, though no man alive can write better of economy than himself, yet, perhaps, he is above the drudgery of practising it: Sir Richard, then, was often in want of money, and, while we were in friendship with him, we often assisted his occasions: but those compliances had so unfortunate an effect, that they only heightened his importunity to borrow more, and the more we lent the less he minded us, or showed any concern for our welfare. Upon this, sir, we stopped our hands at once, and peremptorily refused to advance another shilling, till, by the balance of our accounts, it became due to him. And this treatment, though we hope not in the least unjustifiable, we have reason to believe so ruffled his temper, that he at once was as short with us as we had been with him; for, from that day, he never more came near us: nay, sir, he not only continued to neglect what he *should* have done, but actually did what he *ought not* to have done; he made an assignment of his share without our consent, in a manifest breach of our agreement; for, sir, we did not lay that restriction upon ourselves for no reason; we knew, before hand, what trouble and inconvenience it would be to unravel and expose our accounts to strangers, who, if they were to do us no hurt by divulging our secrets, we were

sure could do us no good by keeping them. If Sir Richard had had our common interest at heart, he would have been as warm in it as we were, and as tender of hurting it: but, supposing his assigning his share to others may have done us no great injury, it is, at least, a shrewd proof that he did not care whether it did us any or no; and if the clause was not strong enough to restrain him from it, in law, there was enough in it to have restrained him, in honour, from breaking it. But, take it in its best light, it shows him as remiss a manager in our affairs, as he naturally was in his own. Suppose, sir, we had all been as careless as himself, which I cannot find he has any more right to be than we have, must not our whole affair have fallen to ruin? And may we not, by a parity of reason, suppose that, by his neglect, a fourth part of it *does* fall to ruin? But, sir, there is a particular reason to believe that from our want of Sir Richard, more than a fourth part *does* suffer by it: his rank and figure in the world, while he gave us the assistance of them, were of extraordinary service to us; he had an easier access, and a more regarded audience at court, than our low station of life could pretend to, when our interest wanted, as it often did, a particular solicitation there. But, since we have been deprived of him, the very end, the very consideration of his share in our profits, is not performed on his part. And will Sir Richard, then, make us no compensation for so valuable a loss in our interests, and so palpable an addition to our labour? I am afraid, sir, if we were all to be as indolent in the managing part as Sir Richard presumes he has a right to be, our patent would soon run us as many hundreds in debt, as he had, and still seems willing to have, his share of, for doing of nothing.

Sir, our next point in question is, whether Wilks, Booth, and Cibber are justifiable in charging the *£1. 13s. 4d. per diem*, for their extraordinary management in the absence of Sir Richard Steele. I doubt, sir, it will be hard to come to the solution of this point, unless we may be a little indulged in setting forth what is the daily and necessary business and duty of a manager. But, sir, we will endeavour to be as short as the circumstances will admit of.

Sir, by our books, it is apparent that the managers have under their care no less than one hundred and forty persons, in constant daily pay; and, among such numbers, it will be no wonder if a great many of them are unskilful, idle, and sometimes untractable; all which tempers are to be led or driven, watched, and restrained, by the continual skill, care, and patience of the managers. Every manager is obliged, in his turn, to attend two or three hours every morning, at the rehearsal of plays, and other entertainments for the stage, or else every rehearsal would be but a rude meeting of mirth and jollity. The same attendance is as necessary at every play, during the time of its public action, in which one or more of us have constantly been punctual, whether we have had any part in the play then acted or not. A manager ought to be at the reading of every new play, when it is first offered to the stage, though there are seldom one of those plays in twenty which, upon hearing, proves to be fit for it; and upon such occasions the attendance must be allowed to be as painfully tedious, as the getting rid of the authors of such plays must be disagreeable and difficult. Besides this, sir, a manager is to order all new clothes, to assist in the fancy and propriety of them, to limit the expense, and to withstand the unreasonable importunities of some that are apt to think themselves injured if they are not finer than their fellows. A manager is to direct and oversee the painters, machinists, musicians, singers, and dancers; to have an eye upon the door-keepers, under-servants, and officers that, without such care, are too often apt to defraud us, or neglect their duty.

And all this, sir, and more, much more, which we hope will be needless to trouble you with, have we done every day, without the least assistance from Sir Richard, even at times when the concern and labour of our parts, upon the stage, have made it very difficult and irksome to go through with it.

In this place, sir, it may be worth observing that Sir Richard, in his answer to our cross-bill, seems to value himself upon Cibber's confessing, in the dedication of a play,\* which he made to Sir

\* "Ximenes; or, the Heroic Daughter:" tragedy, 1719.

Richard, that he (Sir Richard) had done the stage very considerable service, by leading the town to our plays, and filling our houses, by the force and influence of his "Tattlers." But Sir Richard forgets that those "Tattlers" were written in the late Queen's reign, long before he was admitted to a share in the playhouse. And, in truth, sir, it was our real sense of those obligations, and Sir Richard's assuring us they should be continued, that first and chiefly inclined us to invite him to share the profits of our labours, upon such farther conditions as, in his assignment of the patent to us, are specified. And, sir, as Cibber's public acknowledgment of those favours is at the same time an equal proof of Sir Richard's power to continue them, so, sir, we hope it carries an equal probability that without his promise to *use* that power, he would never have been thought on, much less have been invited by us into a joint-management of the stage, and into a share of the profits: and, indeed, what pretence could he have formed for asking a patent from the crown, had he been possessed of no eminent qualities but in common with other men? But, sir, all these advantages, all these hopes, nay certainties of greater profits from those great qualities have we been utterly deprived of, by the wilful and unexpected neglect of Sir Richard. But we find, sir, it is a common thing, in the practice of mankind, to justify one error by committing another. For Sir Richard has not only refused us the extraordinary assistance which he is able and bound to give us, but, on the contrary, to our great expense and loss of time, now calls us to account, in this honourable court, for the wrong we have done him, in not doing his business of a manager for nothing. But, sir, Sir Richard has not met with such treatment from us: he has not written plays for us for *nothing*; we paid him very well, and in an extraordinary manner, for his late comedy of the "Conscious Lovers:" and though, in writing that play he had more assistance from one of the managers than becomes me to enlarge upon, of which evidence has been given upon oath by several of our actors, yet, sir, he was allowed the full and particular profits of that play, as an author, which amounted to three hundred pounds, besides

about three hundred more, which he received as a joint-sharer of the general profits that arose from it. Now, sir, though the managers are not all of them able to write plays, yet they have all of them been able to do (I won't say as good, but, at least,) as profitable a thing; they have invented and adorned a spectacle that, for forty days together, has brought more money to the house, than the best play that ever was written. The spectacle I mean, sir, is that of the coronation ceremony of "Anna Bullen;" and though we allow a good play to be the more laudable performance, yet, sir, in the profitable part of it there is no comparison. If, therefore, our spectacle brought in as much or more money than Sir Richard's comedy, what is there on his side, but usage, that intitles him to be paid for one more than we are for the other? But then, sir, if he is so profitably distinguished for his play, if we yield him up the preference, and pay him for his extraordinary composition, and take nothing for our own, though it turned out more to our common profit; surely, sir, while we do such extraordinary duty, as managers, and while he neglects his share of that duty, he cannot grudge us the moderate demand we make for our separate labour.

To conclude, sir, if by our constant attendance, our care, our anxiety, (not to mention the disagreeable contests we sometimes meet with, both within and without doors, in the management of our theatre) we have not only saved the whole from ruin, which, if we had all followed Sir Richard's example, could not have been avoided; I say, sir, if we have still made it so valuable an income to him, without his giving us the least assistance for several years past, we hope, sir, that the poor labourers that have done all this for Sir Richard, will not be thought unworthy of their hire.

How far our affairs being set in this particular light might assist our cause, may be of no great importance to guess; but the issue of it was this, that Sir Richard, not having made any objection to what we had charged for management, for three years together, and as our proceedings had been all transacted in open day, without any

clandestine intention of fraud, we were allowed the sums in dispute, above-mentioned; and Sir Richard not being advised to appeal to the Lord Chancellor, both parties paid their own costs, and thought it their mutual interest to let this be the last of their lawsuits.

And now, gentle reader, I ask pardon for so long an imposition on your patience: for though I may have no ill opinion of this matter myself, yet, to you, I can very easily conceive it may have been tedious. You are, therefore, at your own liberty of charging the whole impertinence of it either to the weakness of my judgment, or the strength of my vanity; and I will so far join in your censure, that I farther confess I have been so impatient to give it you, that you have had it out of its turn: for some years before this suit was commenced, there were other facts that ought to have had a precedence in my history. But that, I dare say, is an oversight you will easily excuse, provided you afterwards find them worth reading. However, as to that point I must take my chance, and shall therefore proceed to speak of the theatre, which was ordered by his late majesty to be erected in the great hall at Hampton Court, where plays were intended to have been acted twice a week, during the summer season. But before the theatre could be finished, above half the month of September being elapsed, there were but seven plays acted before the court returned to London. This throwing open a theatre in a royal palace seemed to be reviving the old English hospitable grandeur, where the lowest rank of neighbouring subjects might make themselves merry at court, without being laughed at themselves. In former reigns, theatrical entertainments at the royal palaces had been performed at vast expense,\* as appears by the description of the deco-

\* A masque given by the four inns of court, on the 2d of Fe-

rations in several of Ben Jonson's masques, in King James and Charles the First's time; many curious and original draughts of which, by Sir Inigo Jones, I have seen in the museum of our greatest master and patron of arts and architecture, whom it would be a needless liberty to name.\* But when our civil wars ended in the decadence of monarchy, it was then an honour to the stage to have fallen with it: yet, after the restoration of Charles the Second, some faint attempts were made to revive these theatrical spectacles at court; but I have met with no account of above one mask acted there, by the nobility; which was that of "Calisto," written by Crowne, the author of "Sir Courtly Nice." For what reason Crowne was chosen to that honour, rather than Dryden, who was then poet-laureat, and out of all comparison, his superior in poetry, may seem surprising. But if we consider the offence which the then Duke of Buckingham took at the character of *Zimri*, in Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel," (which might probably be a return to his grace's *Drawcansir* in the "Rehearsal,") we may suppose the prejudice and recommendation of so illustrious a pretender to poetry, might prevail, at court, to give Crowne this preference. In the same reign, the king had his comedians at Windsor, but upon a particular establishment; for though they acted in St. George's Hall, within the royal palace, yet (as I have been informed by an eye-witness) they were permitted to take money at the door of every spectator; whether this was an indulgence, in conscience, I cannot say, but it was a common report among the principal actors, when I first came into the theatre royal, in 1690, that there was, then, due to the company, from that

bruary, 1633-4, cost twenty thousand pounds. The clothes of an hundred horsemen employed in it amounted to half the sum.

\* The Earl of Burlington.



court, about one thousand five hundred pounds, for plays commanded, &c., and yet it was the general complaint, in that prince's reign, that he paid too much ready money for his pleasures. But these assertions I only give as I received them, without being answerable for their reality. This theatrical anecdote, however, puts me in mind of one of a more private nature, which I had from old solemn Boman,\* the late actor of venerable memory. Boman, then a youth, and famed for his voice, was appointed to sing some part in a concert of music, at the private lodgings of Mrs. Gwynn; at which were only present the king, the Duke of York, and one or two more, who were usually admitted upon those detached parties of pleasure. When the performance was ended, the king expressed himself highly pleased, and gave it extraordinary commendations: "Then, sir," said the lady, "to show you don't speak like a courtier, I hope you will make the performers a handsome present." The king said he had no money about him, and asked the duke if he had any? To which the duke replied, "I believe, sir, not above a guinea or two." Upon which the laughing lady, turning to the people about her, and making bold with the king's common expression, cried, "Odd's fish, what company am I got into!"

Whether the reverend historian of his *Own Time*,† among the many other reasons of the same kind he might have for styling this fair one the "indiscreetest, and wildest creature, that ever was in a court," might know this to be one of them, I can't say: but if we consider her, in all the

\* This actor was the last of the Bettertonian school, and continued upon the stage till he had nearly reached his eightieth year. He joined the duke's company, when a boy, in 1673. (1) and played at Drury-lane theatre in 1735.

† Bishop Burnet.

(1) "Roscius Anglicanus."

disadvantages of her rank and education, she does not appear to have had any criminal errors more remarkable than her sex's frailty to answer for. And, if the same author, in his latter end of that prince's life, seems to reproach his memory with too kind a concern for her support, we may allow that it becomes a bishop to have had no eyes or taste for the frivolous charms or playful *badinage* of a king's mistress: yet, if the common fame of her may be believed, which in my memory was not doubted, she had less to be laid to her charge than any other of those ladies who were in the same state of preferment. She never meddled in matters of serious moment, nor was the tool of working politicians: never broke into those amorous infidelities which others, in that grave author, are accused of; but was as visibly distinguished by her particular personal inclination to the king, as her rivals were, by their titles and grandeur. Give me leave to carry (perhaps, the partiality of) my observation a little farther. The same author, in the same page, 263, tells us, that "Another of the king's mistresses, the daughter of a clergyman, Mrs. Roberts, in whom her first education had so deep a root that, though she fell into many scandalous disorders, with very dismal adventures in them all, yet a principle of religion was so deep laid in her that, though it did not restrain her, yet it kept alive in her such a constant horror of sin, that she was never easy in an ill course, and died with a great sense of her former ill life." To all this let us give an implicit credit. Here is the account of a frail sinner made up with a reverend witness, yet I cannot but lament, that this mitred historian, who seems to know more personal secrets than any that ever wrote before him, should not have been as inquisitive after the last hours of our other fair offender, whose repentance, I have been unquestionably informed, appeared in all the contrite symp-

toms of a Christian sincerity. If, therefore, you find I am so much concerned to make this favourable mention of the one, because she was a sister of the theatre, why may not—but I dare not be so presumptuous, so uncharitably bold, as to suppose the other was spoken better of merely because she was the daughter of a clergyman. Well, and what then? What's all this idle prate, you may say, to the matter in hand? Why, I say your question is a little too critical; and if you won't give an author leave, now and then, to embellish his work by a natural reflection, you are an ungentle reader. But I have done with my digression, and return to our theatre at Hampton Court, where I am not sure the reader, be he ever so wise, will meet with anything more worth his notice: however, if he happens to read as I write, for want of something better to do, he will go on; and, perhaps, wonder when I tell him that a play presented at court or acted on a public stage seem, to their different auditors, a different entertainment. Now hear my reason for it. In the common theatre the guests are at home, where the politer forms of good-breeding are not so nicely regarded; every one there falls to, and likes or finds fault according to his natural taste or appetite. At court, where the prince gives the treat and honours the table with his own presence, the audience is under the restraint of a circle, where laughter or applause, raised higher than a whisper, would be stared at. At a public play they are both let loose, even till the actor is sometimes pleased with his not being able to be heard, for the clamour of them. But this coldness or decency of attention at court, I observed, had but a melancholy effect upon the impatient vanity of some of our actors, who seemed inconsolable when their flashy endeavours to please had passed unheeded. Their not considering where they were quite disconcerted them; nor could they recover their spirits

till, from the lowest rank of the audience, some gaping John or Joan, in the fulness of their hearts, roared out their approbation : and, indeed, such a natural instance of honest simplicity a prince himself, whose indulgence knows where to make allowances, might reasonably smile at, and perhaps not think it the worst part of his entertainment. Yet it must be owned, that an audience may be as well too much reserved as too profuse of their applause : for though it is possible a Betterton would not have been discouraged from throwing out an excellence, or elated into an error, by his auditors being too little or too much pleased, yet as actors of his judgment are rarities, those of less judgment may sink into a flatness in their performance, for want of that applause which, from the generality of judges, they might perhaps, have some pretence to : and the auditor, when not seeming to feel what ought to affect him, may rob himself of something more that he might have had, by giving the actor his due, who measures out his power to please according to the value he sets upon his hearer's taste or capacity. But, however, as we were not here itinerant adventurers, and had properly but one royal auditor to please, after that honour was attained to, the rest of our ambition had little to look after : and that the king was often pleased we were not only assured, by those who had the honour to be near him, but could see it, from the frequent satisfaction in his looks at particular scenes and passages. One instance of which I am tempted to relate, because it was at a speech that might more naturally affect a sovereign prince than any private spectator. In Shakespeare's "Henry the Eighth," that *King* commands the *Cardinal* to write circular letters of indemnity into every county where the payment of certain heavy taxes had been disputed ; upon which the Cardinal whispers the following directions to his secretary, *Cromwell* :

——— A word with you :

Let there be letters writ to every shire,  
 Of the king's grace, and pardon : the griev'd commons  
 Hardly conceive of me. Let it be nois'd,  
 That through our intercession, this revokement,  
 And pardon, comes. I shall anon advise you  
 Farther in the proceeding.——

The solicitude of this spiritual minister, in filching from his master the grace and merit of a good action, and dressing up himself in it, while himself had been author of the evil complained of, was so easy a stroke of his temporal conscience, that it seemed to raise the king into something more than a smile, whenever that play came before him : and I had a more distinct occasion to observe this effect; because my proper stand on the stage, when I spoke the lines,\* required me to be near the box where the king usually sat. In a word, this play is so true a dramatic chronicle of an old English court, and where the character of *Henry the Eighth* is so exactly drawn, even to a humourous likeness, that it may be no wonder why his majesty's particular taste for it should have commanded it three several times in one winter.

\* “ Colley Cibber's pride and passion, in *Wolsey*, were impotent, and almost farcical. His grief, resignation, and tenderness, were inadequate, from a deficiency of those powers of expression which the melting tones of voice, and a corresponding propriety of gesture, can alone bestow.”—Davies's “*Dramatic Miscellanies*,” vol. 1, p. 407.

It appears from the same source, that Cibber, in saying

This candle burns not clear ; 'tis I must snuff it,  
 And out it goes,

imitated, with his fore-finger and thumb, the extinguishing of a candle with a pair of snuffers. Such wretched mimicry is almost incredible.

This, too, calls to my memory an extravagant pleasantry of Sir Richard Steele, who being asked by a grave nobleman, after the same play had been presented at Hampton Court, how the king liked it, replied, " So terribly well, my lord, that I was afraid I should have lost all my actors ; for I was not sure the king would not keep them to fill the posts at court, that he saw them so fit for in the play."

It may be imagined that giving plays to the people, at such a distance from London, could not but be attended with an extraordinary expense ; and it was some difficulty, when they were first talked of, to bring them under a moderate sum ; I shall, therefore, in as few words as possible, give a particular of what establishment they were then brought to, that in case the same entertainments should at any time hercafter be called to the same place, future courts may judge how far the precedent may stand good, or need any alteration.

Though the stated fee for a play acted at Whitehall had been formerly but twenty pounds,\* yet, as that hindered

\* " Whereas by virtue of his majesties letters patent, bearing date the 16th of June, 1625, made and graunted in confirmation of diverse warrants and privy seales unto you formerly directed in the time of our late soveraigne King James, you are authorised (amongst other things) to make payment for playes acted before his majesty and the queene. Theis are to pray and require you, out of his majesties treasure in your charge, to pay or cause to be payed unto John Lowing, in the behalfe of himselfe, and the rest of the company his majesties players, the sum of two hundred and sixty pounds ; that is to say, *twenty pounds* apiece for four playes acted at Hampton Court, in respect and consideration of the travaile and expence of the whole company in dyet and lodging during the time of their attendance there ; and the like somme of *twenty pounds* for one other play, which was acted in the day-

not the company's acting on the same day at the public theatre, that sum was almost all clear profits to them: but this circumstance not being practicable, when they were commanded to Hampton Court, a new and extraordinary charge was unavoidable: the managers, therefore, not to inflame it, desired no consideration for their own labour, farther than the honour of being employed in his majesty's commands; and, if the other actors might be allowed each their day's pay and travelling charges, they should hold themselves ready to act any play, there, at a day's warning: and that the trouble might be less by being divided, the Lord Chamberlain was pleased to let us know that the household music, the wax lights, and a chaise-marine, to carry our moving wardrobe to every different play, should be under the charge of the proper officers. Notwithstanding these assistances, the expense of every play amounted to fifty pounds: which account, when all was over, was not only allowed us, but his majesty was graciously pleased to give the managers two hundred pounds more, for their particular performance and trouble in only seven times acting. Which last sum, though it might not be too much for a sovereign prince to give, was certainly more than our utmost merit ought to have hoped for: and I confess, when I received the order for the money from his grace the Duke of Newcastle, then Lord Chamberlain, I was so surprised, that I imagined his grace's favour

*time at Whitehall, by meanes whereof the players lost the benefit of their house for that day; and ten pounds apiece for sixteen other playes acted before his majestie and the queene at severall times, between the 30th of Sept. and 21st of Feb. last past. As it may appeare by the annexed schedule.*

“And theis, &c. March 17, 1630-1.”

MS. in the Lord Chamberlain's Office.

or recommendation of our readiness, or diligence, must have contributed to so high a consideration of it, and was offering my acknowledgments, as I thought them due ; but was soon stopped short by his grace's declaration, that we had no obligations for it but to the king himself, who had given it from no other motive than his own bounty. Now whether we may suppose that *Cardinal Wolsey*, as you see Shakspeare has drawn him, would silently have taken such low acknowledgments to himself, perhaps, may be as little worth consideration as my mentioning this circumstance has been necessary : but if it is due to the honour and integrity of the (then) Lord Chamberlain, I cannot think it wholly impertinent.

Since that time there has been but one play given at Hampton Court, which was for the entertainment of the Duke of Lorrain ; and for which his present majesty was pleased to order us a hundred pounds.

The reader may now plainly see that I am ransacking my memory for such remaining scraps of theatrical history as may not, perhaps, be worth his notice ; but, if they are such as tempt me to write them, why may I not hope that, in this wide world, there may be many an idle soul, no wiser than myself, who may be equally tempted to read them ?

I have so often had occasion to compare the state of the stage to the state of a nation, that I yet feel a reluctance to drop the comparison, or speak of the one without some application to the other. How many reigns, then, do I remember, from that of Charles the Second, through all which there has been, from one half of the people or the other, a succession of clamour against every different ministry for the time being ? And yet, let the cause of this clamour have been never so well grounded, it is impossible but that some of those ministers must have been wiser and



honestest men than others : if this be true, as true I believe it is, why may I not then say, as some fool in a French play does, upon a like occasion—"Justement, comme chez nous !" It was exactly the same with our management : let us have done never so well, we could not please every body. All I can say, in our defence, is that, though many good judges might possibly conceive how the state of the stage might have been mended, yet the best of them never pretended to remember the time when it was better, or could show us the way to make their imaginary amendments practicable. For though I have often allowed that our best merit, as actors, was never equal to that of our predecessors, yet I will venture to say that, in all its branches, the stage had never been under so just, so prosperous, and so settled a regulation, for forty years before, as it was at the time I am speaking of. The most plausible objection to our administration seemed to be that, we took no care to breed up young actors, to succeed us ; and this was imputed as the greater fault, because it was taken for granted that it was a matter as easy as planting so many cabbages : now might not a court as well be reproached for not breeding up a succession of complete ministers ? And yet, it is evident, that if providence or nature do not supply us with both, the state and the stage will be but poorly supported. If a man of an ample fortune should take it into his head to give a younger son an extraordinary allowance, in order to breed him a great poet, what might we suppose would be the odds that his trouble and money would be all thrown away ? Not more than it would be against the master of a theatre, who should say "This or that young man I will take care shall be an excellent actor." Let it be our excuse, then, for that mistaken charge against us, that since there was no garden or market where accomplished actors grew, or were to be

sold, we could only pick them up as we do pebbles of value, by chance: we may polish a thousand before we can find one fit to make a figure in the lid of a snuff-box. And how few soever we were able to produce, it is no proof that we were not always in search of them: yet, at worst, it was allowed that our deficiency of men actors was not so visible as our scarcity of tolerable women: but, when it is considered that the life of youth and beauty is too short for the bringing an actress to her perfection; were I to mention, too, the many frail fair ones I remember, who, before they could arrive to their theatrical maturity, were feloniously stolen from the tree, it would rather be thought our misfortune than our fault, that we were not better provided.

Even the laws of a nunnery, we find, are thought no sufficient security against temptations, without iron grates and high walls to inforce them; which the architecture of a theatre will not so properly admit of: and yet, methinks, beauty that has not those artificial fortresses about it, that has no defence but its natural virtue, which, upon the stage, has more than once been met with, makes a much more meritorious figure in life than that immured virtue which could never be tried. But, alas, as the poor stage is but the show-glass to a toy-shop, we must not wonder if now and then some of the bawbles should find a purchaser.

However, as to say more or less than truth is equally unfaithful in an historian, I cannot but own that in the government of the theatre I have known many instances where the merit of promising actors has not always been brought forward, with the regard or favour it had a claim to: and if I put my reader in mind that in the early part of this work I have shown through what continued difficulties and discouragements I myself made my way up the

hill of preferment, he may justly call it too strong a glare of my vanity: I am afraid he is in the right; but I pretend not to be one of those chaste authors that know how to write without it: when truth is to be told, it may be as much chance as choice if it happens to turn out in my favour. But to show that this was true of others as well as myself, Booth shall be another instance. In 1707, when Swiny was the only master of the company in the Haymarket, Wilks, though he was then but an hired actor himself, rather chose to govern and give orders than to receive them, and was so jealous of Booth's rising, that, with a high hand, he gave the part of *Pierre*, in "Venice Preserved," to Mills the elder, who (not to undervalue him) was out of sight in the pretensions that Booth, then young as he was, had to the same part: and this very discouragement so strongly affected him, that, not long after, when several of us became sharers with Swiny, Booth rather chose to risk his fortune with the old patentee in Drury-lane, than come into our interest, where he saw he was like to meet with more of those partialities. And yet, again, Booth himself, when he came to be a manager, would sometimes suffer his judgment to be blinded by his inclination to actors whom the town seemed to have but an indifferent opinion of. This, again, inclines me to ask another of my odd questions, *viz.* Have we never seen the same passions govern a court? How many white staffs and great places do we find, in our histories, have been laid at the feet of a monarch, because they chose not to give way to a rival in power, or hold a second place in his favour? How many whigs and tories have changed their parties, when their good or bad pretensions have met with a check to their higher preferment?

Thus, we see, let the degrees and rank of men be ever so unequal, nature throws out their passions from the same

motives; 'tis not the eminence or lowliness of either that makes the one, when provoked, more or less a reasonable creature than the other: the courtier and the comedian, when their ambition is out of humour, take just the same measures to right themselves.

If this familiar style of talking should, in the nostrils of gravity and wisdom, smell a little too much of the presumptuous or the pragmatistical, I will, at least, descend lower, in my apology for it, by calling to my assistance the old, humble proverb, *viz.* " 'Tis an ill bird that," &c. Why then should I debase my profession, by setting it in vulgar lights, when I may show it to more favourable advantages? And when I speak of our errors, why may I not extenuate them by illustrious examples; or by not allowing them greater than the greatest men have been subject to? Or why, indeed, may I not suppose that a sensible reader will rather laugh than look grave at the pomp of my parallels?

Now, as I am tied down to the veracity of an historian, whose facts cannot be supposed, like those in a romance, to be in the choice of the author, to make them more marvellous by invention; if I should happen to sink into a little farther insignificancy, let the simple truth of what I have farther to say, be my excuse for it. I am obliged, therefore, to make the experiment, by showing you the conduct of our theatrical ministry in such lights as, on various occasions, it appeared in.

Though Wilks had more industry and application than any actor I had ever known, yet we found it possible that those necessary qualities might sometimes be so misconducted, as not only to make them useless, but hurtful to our commonwealth; for while he was impatient to be foremost in every thing, he frequently shocked the honest ambition of others, whose measures might have been more serviceable, could his jealousy have given way to them. His

own regards for himself, therefore, were, to avoid a disagreeable dispute with him, too often complied with; but this leaving his diligence to his own conduct made us, in some instances, pay dearly for it: for example, he would take as much or more pains in forwarding to the stage the water-gruel work of some insipid author, that happened rightly to make his court to him, than he would for the best play, wherein it was not his fortune to be chosen for the best character. So great was his impatience to be employed, that I scarcely remember, in twenty years, above one profitable play we could get to be revived, wherein he found he was to make no considerable figure, independent of him: but the "Tempest" having done wonders formerly, he could not form any pretensions to let it lie longer dormant; however, his coldness to it was so visible, that he took all occasions to postpone and discourage its progress, by frequently taking up the morning stage with something more to his mind. Having been myself particularly solicitous for the reviving this play, Dogget (for this was before Booth came into the management) consented that the extraordinary decorations and habits should be left to my care and direction, as the fittest person whose temper could jostle through the petulant opposition that he knew Wilks would be always offering to it, because he had but a middling part in it, that of *Ferdinand*. Notwithstanding which, so it happened, that the success of it showed, not to take from the merit of Wilks, that it was possible to have good audiences without his extraordinary assistance. In the first six days of acting it we paid all our constant and incidental expense, and shared each of us a hundred pounds; the greatest profit that in so little a time had yet been known within my memory. But, alas, what was paltry pelf to glory? That was the darling passion of Wilks's heart; and not to advance in it was, to so jealous an ambi-

tion, a painful retreat, a mere shade to his laurels; and the common benefit was but a poor equivalent to his want of particular applause. To conclude, not Prince Lewis of Baden, though a confederate general with the Duke of Marlborough, was more inconsolable upon the memorable victory at Blenheim, at which he was not present, than our theatrical hero was to see any action prosperous that he was not himself at the head of. If this, then, was an infirmity in Wilks, why may not my showing the same weakness in so great a man mollify the imputation, and keep his memory in countenance?

This laudable appetite for fame, in Wilks, was not, however, to be fed without that constant labour which only himself was able to come up to: he, therefore, bethought him of the means to lessen the fatigue, and, at the same time, to heighten his reputation; which was by giving up, now and then, a part to some raw actor, who, he was sure, would disgrace it, and, consequently, put the audience in mind of his superior performance: among this sort of indulgences to young actors, he happened once to maké a mistake that set his views in a clear light. The best critics, I believe, will allow that in Shakspeare's "*Macbeth*" there are, in the part of *Macduff*, two scenes, the one of terror in the second act, and the other of compassion in the fourth, equal to any that dramatic poetry has produced: these scenes Wilks had acted with success,\* though far

\* Wilks's merit in the latter of these scenes is mentioned in the "*Tattler*," No. 68, as follows; and his manner of delivering the last great expression is worthy of being recorded.

"In the tragedy of '*Macbeth*,' where Wilks acts the part of a man whose family has been murdered in his absence, the wildness of his passion, which is overrun in a torrent of calamitous circumstances, does but raise my spirits, and give me the alarm; but when he skilfully seems to be out of breath, and is brought too low

short of that happier skill and grace which Mountfort had formerly shown in them. Such a part, however, one might imagine, would be one of the last a good actor would chuse to part with ; but Wilks was of a different opinion ; for *Macbeth* was thrice as long, had more great scenes of action, and bore the name of the play : now to be a second in any play was what he did not much care for, and had been seldom used to ; this part of *Macduff*, therefore, he had given to one Williams,\* as yet no extraordinary, though a promising actor. Williams, in the simplicity of his heart, im-

to say more ; and upon a second reflection, cries, only wiping his eyes,

What, both children !—Both, both my children gone !

there is no resisting a sorrow which seems to have cast about for all the reasons possible for its consolation, but has no resource.

There is not one left, but both, both are murdered !

Such sudden starts from the thread of the discourse, and a plain sentiment expressed in an artless way, are the irresistible strokes of eloquence and poetry."

" We are told by Colley Cibber, that Wilks had once an intention to resign the part of *Macduff*, in which he had been much applauded, to an inferior actor, and that Booth had made an exchange of *Banquo* for this superior character ; but that the jealousy of Booth's abilities had caused Wilks to resume what he had so indiscreetly given away. In the strong expression of horror on the murder of the *King*, and the loud exclamations of surprise and terror, Booth might have exceeded the utmost efforts of Wilks ; but, in the touches of domestic woe, which require the feelings of the tender father and the affectionate husband, Wilks had no equal. His skill in exhibiting the emotions of the overflowing heart with corresponding look and action, was universally admired and felt. His rising, after the suppression of his anguish, into ardent and manly resentment, was highly expressive of noble and generous anger."—" Dramatic Miscellanies ;" vol. 2, p. 182.

\* Of Charles Williams, who must not be confounded with his

mediately told Booth what a favour Wilks had done him. Booth, as he had reason, thought Wilks had here carried his indulgence and his authority a little too far; for as Booth had no better a part in the same play than that of *Banquo*, he found himself too much disregarded, in letting so young an actor take place of him: Booth, therefore, who knew the value of *Macduff*, proposed to do it himself, and to give *Banquo* to Williams; and, to make him farther amends, offered him any other of his parts that he thought might be of service to him. Williams was content with the exchange, and thankful for the promise. This scheme, indeed, had it taken effect, might have been an ease to Wilks, and possibly no disadvantage to the play; but, softly—that was not quite what he had a mind to. No sooner, then, came this proposal to Wilks, but off went the mask, and out came the secret; for though Wilks wanted to be eased of the part, he did not desire to be excelled in it; and as he was not sure but that might be the case, if Booth were to act it, he wisely retracted his own project, took *Macduff*

namesake and predecessor, the following anecdote is told in Davies's "Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. 3, p. 442.

"When Thomson's *Sophonisba*" was read to the actors, Cibber laid his hand upon *Scipio*, a character which, though it appears only in the last act, is of great dignity and importance. For two nights successively, Cibber was as much exploded as any bad actor could be. Williams, by desire of Wilks, made himself master of the part; but he marching slowly, in great military distinction, from the upper part of the stage, and wearing the same dress as Cibber, was mistaken for him, and met with repeated hisses, joined to the music of catcalls; but, as soon as the audience were undeceived, they converted their groans and hisses to loud and long-continued applause."

"He was," says Theophilus Cibber, (1) "a promising player, who died young."

(1) "Life of Booth."



again to himself, and while he lived never had a thought of running the same hazard, by any farther offer to resign it.

Here, I confess, I am at a loss for a fact in history, to which this can be a parallel. To be weary of a post, even to a real desire of resigning it, and yet to chuse rather to drudge on in it than suffer it to be well supplied, though to share in that advantage is a delicacy of ambition that Machiavel himself has made no mention of; or, if in old Rome, the jealousy of any pretended patriot equally inclined to abdicate his office may have come up to it, 'tis more than my reading remembers.

As nothing can be more impertinent than showing too frequent a fear to be thought so, I will, without farther apology, rather risk that imputation than not tell you another story much to the same purpose, and of no more consequence than my last. To make you understand it, however, a little preface will be necessary.

If the merit of an actor, as it certainly does, consists more in the quality than the quantity of his labour, the other managers had no visible reason to think this needless ambition of Wilks, in being so often, and sometimes so unnecessarily, employed, gave him any title to a superiority; especially when our articles of agreement had allowed us all to be equal. But what are narrow contracts to great souls with growing desires? Wilks, therefore, who thought himself lessened in appealing to any judgment but his own, plainly discovered, by his restless behaviour, though he did not care to speak out, that he thought he had a right to some higher consideration for his performance: this was often Booth's opinion as well as my own. It must be farther observed that he actually had a separate allowance of fifty pounds a year, for writing our daily playbills for the printer, which province, to say the truth, was the only one we cared to trust to his particular intendance, or could find out for a pretence to distinguish him. But, to speak a

plainer truth, this pension, which was no part of our original agreement, was merely paid to keep him quiet, and not that we thought it due to so insignificant a charge as what a prompter had formerly executed. This being really the case, his frequent complaints of being a drudge to the company grew something more than disagreeable to us ; for we could not digest the imposition of a man's setting himself to work, and then bringing in his own bill for it. Booth, therefore, who was less easy than I was to see him so often setting a merit upon this quantity of his labour, which it neither could be our interest nor his own to lay upon him ; proposed to me that we might remove this pretended grievance, by reviving some play that might be likely to live, and be easily acted, without Wilks's having any part in it. About this time, an unexpected occasion offered itself to put our project in practice : what followed our attempt will be all (if any thing be) worth observation in my story.

In 1725, we were called upon, in a manner that could not be resisted, to revive the "Provoked Wife," a comedy which, while we found our account in keeping the stage clear of those loose liberties it had, formerly, too justly been charged with, we had laid aside, for some years. The author, Sir John Vanbrugh, who was conscious of what it had too much of, was prevailed upon to substitute a new written scene, in the place of one, in the fourth act, where the wantonness of his wit and humour had (originally) made a rake talk like a rake, in the borrowed habit of a clergyman : to avoid which offence, he clapped the same debauchee into the undress of a woman of quality : now the character and profession of a fine lady, not being so indelibly sacred as that of a churchman, whatever follies he exposed in the petticoat, kept him, at least, clear of his former profaneness, and were now innocently ridiculous to the spectator.

This play, being thus refitted for the stage, was, as I have observed, called for from court, and by many of the nobility.

Now, then, we thought, was a proper time to come to an explanation with Wilks : accordingly, when the actors were summoned to hear the play read, and receive their parts, I addressed myself to Wilks, before them all, and told him, that as the part of *Constant*, which he seemed to chuse, was a character of less action than he generally appeared in, we thought this might be a good occasion to ease himself, by giving it to another ;—here he looked grave.—That the love-scenes of it were rather serious than gay or humourous, and therefore might sit very well upon Booth ;—down dropped his brow, and furled were his features.—That if we were never to revive a tolerable play without him, what would become of us in case of his indisposition ?—here he pretended to stir the fire.—That as he could have no farther advantage or advancement in his station to hope for, his acting in this play was but giving himself an unprofitable trouble, which neither Booth nor I desired to impose upon him.—Softly.—Now the pill began to gripe him.—In a word, this provoking civility plunged him into a passion which he was no longer able to contain ; out it came, with all the equipage of unlimited language that, on such occasions, his displeasure usually set out with ; but when his reply was stripped of those ornaments, it was plainly this : that he looked upon all I had said as a concerted design not only to signalise ourselves, by laying him aside, but a contrivance to draw him into the disfavour of the nobility, by making it supposed his own choice that he did not act in a play so particularly asked for ; but we should find he could stand upon his own bottom, and it was not all our little caballing should get our ends of him. To which I answered, with some warmth, that he was mistaken in our ends ; “ for those, sir,” said I, “ you have answered already, by showing the company you cannot bear to be left out of any play. Are not you every day complaining of your being overlabour-

ed? And now, upon our first offering to ease you, you fly into a passion, and pretend to make that a greater grievance than the other: but, sir, if your being in or out of the play is a hardship, you shall impose it upon yourself: the part is in your hand, and to us it is a matter of indifference, now, whether you take it or leave it." Upon this he threw down the part upon the table, crossed his arms and sate knocking his heel upon the floor, as seeming to threaten most when he said least; but when nobody persuaded him to take it up again, Booth, not chusing to push the matter too far, but rather to split the difference of our dispute, said that, for his part, he saw no such great matter in acting every day; for he believed it the wholesomest exercise in the world; it kept the spirits in motion, and always gave him a good stomach. Though this was, in a manner, giving up the part to Wilks, yet it did not allow he did us any favour in receiving it. Here I observed Mrs. Oldfield began to titter, behind her fan: but Wilks, being more intent upon what Booth had said, replied, every one could best feel for himself, but he did not pretend to the strength of a pack-horse; therefore, if Mrs. Oldfield would chuse any body else to play with her, he should be very glad to be excused. This throwing the negative upon Mrs. Oldfield was, indeed, a sure way to save himself; which I could not help taking notice of, by saying it was making but an ill compliment to the company, to suppose there was but one man in it fit to play an ordinary part with her. Here Mrs. Oldfield got up, and, turning me half round to come forward, said, with her usual frankness, "Pooh! you are all a parcel of fools, to make such a rout about nothing;" rightly judging that the person most out of humour would not be more displeased at her calling us all by the same name. As she knew, too, the best way of ending the debate would be to help the weak, she said she hoped Mr. Wilks would not so far mind what

had past, as to refuse his acting the part with her ; for though it might not be so good as he had been used to, yet, she believed, those who had bespoken the play would expect to have it done to the best advantage, and it would make but an odd story abroad, if it were known there had been any difficulty in that point among ourselves. To conclude, Wilks had the part, and we had all we wanted ; which was an occasion to let him see that the accident or choice of one manager's being more employed than another, would never be allowed a pretence for altering our indentures, or his having an extraordinary consideration for it.

However disagreeable it might be to have this unsocial temper daily to deal with, yet I cannot but say, that from the same impatient spirit that had so often hurt us we still drew valuable advantages ; for as Wilks seemed to have no joy in life beyond his being distinguished on the stage, we were not only sure of his always doing his best there himself, but of making others more careful than, without the rod of so irascible a temper over them, they would have been : and I much question if a more temperate or better usage of the hired actors, could have so effectually kept them to order. Not even Betterton, as we have seen, with all his good sense, his great fame, and experience, could, by being only a quiet example of industry himself, save his company from falling, while neither gentleness could govern, or the consideration of their common interest reform, them. Diligence, with much the inferior skill or capacity, will beat the best negligent company that ever came upon a stage. But when a certain dreaming idleness, or jolly negligence of rehearsals, gets into a body of the ignorant and incapable, which, before Wilks came into Drury-lane, when Powel was at the head of them, was the case of that company, then, I say, a sensible spectator might have looked upon the fallen stage, as *Porcius*, in the play of

“Cato,” does upon his ruined country, and have lamented it, in (something near) the same exclamation; *viz.*

—O ye immortal bards!

What havoc do these blockheads make among  
your works!

How are the boasted labours of an age

Defac'd, and tortur'd, by ungracious action!

Of these wicked doings, Dryden, too, complains in one of his prologues, at that time, where, speaking of such lewd actors, he closes a couplet with the following line; *viz.*

And murder plays, which they miscal reviving.

The great share, therefore, that Wilks, by his exemplary diligence, and impatience of neglect in others, had in the reformation of this evil, ought, in justice, to be remembered; and let my own vanity here take shame to itself, when I confess that had I had half his application, I still think I might have shown myself twice the actor that, in my highest state of favour, I appeared to be. But, if I have any excuse for that neglect, a fault which, if I loved not truth, I need not have mentioned, it is that so much of my attention was taken up in an incessant labour to guard against our private animosities, and preserve a harmony in our management, that I hope and believe it made ample amends for whatever omissions my auditors might sometimes know it cost me some pains to conceal.\* But nature takes care

\* If there is any truth in Dennis's assertion, that Cibber squandered away six thousand pounds, in less than two years, at the gaming-table, (1) he might have furnished us with a truer reason for his negligence than he has chosen to supply. Without depend-

(1) See “Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar;” 1720.

to bestow her blessings with a more equal hand than fortune does, and is seldom known to heap too many upon one man : one tolerable talent in an individual is enough to preserve him from being good for nothing ; and if that was not laid to my charge, as an actor, I have in this light, too, less to complain of than to be thankful for.

Before I conclude my history, it may be expected I should give some further view of these my last cotemporaries of the theatre, Wilks and Booth, in their different acting capacities. If I were to paint them in the colours they laid upon one another, their talents would not be shown with half the commendation I am inclined to bestow upon them, when they are left to my own opinion. But people of the same profession are apt to see themselves in their own clear glass of partiality, and look upon their equals through a mist of prejudice. It might be imagined, too, from the difference of their natural tempers, that Wilks should have been more blind to the excellencies of Booth, than Booth was to those of Wilks ; but it was not so : Wilks would sometimes commend Booth to me ; but when Wilks excel-

ing upon this exaggerated charge, which was partly denied, (2) it is well known that Cibber could not, from his habitual dissipation, have devoted himself entirely to the object which he assured us engrossed him.

After many an unlucky run at Tom's coffee-house, in Russell-street, (says Mr. Davies,) (3) he has arrived at the playhouse in great tranquillity, and then, humming over an opera tune, walked on the stage, very imperfect in the part he had to act. I have seen him at fault (continues the same veracious authority) where it was least expected, in parts he had acted an hundred times ; and

(2) "Dramatic Miscellanies ;" vol. 3, p. 450.

(3) See "Answer to a Whimsical Pamphlet," &c. 1720.

led, the other was silent.\* Booth seemed to think nothing valuable, that was not tragically great or marvellous: let that be as true as it may, yet I have often thought that from his having no taste of humour himself, he might be too much inclined to depreciate the acting of it in others. The very slight opinion which, in private conversation with me, he had of Wilks's acting *Sir Harry Wildair*, was certainly more than could be justified; not only from the general applause that was against that opinion, though applause is not always infallible, but from the visible capacity which must be allowed to an actor, that could carry such slight materials to such a height of approbation: for though the character of *Wildair* scarce in any one scene will stand against a just criticism, yet, in the whole, there are so many gay and false colours of the fine gentleman, that nothing but a vivacity in the performance proportionably extravagant, could have made them so happily glare upon a common audience.

particularly in *Sir Courtly Nice*; but Colley dexterously supplied the deficiency of his memory, by prolonging his ceremonious bow to the lady, and drawling out, "Your humble servant, madam," to an extraordinary length; then, taking a pinch of snuff, and strutting deliberately across the stage, he has gravely asked the prompter, "What is next?"

\* This charge of uncandid feeling is corroborated by Mr. Davies, in his "Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. 3, p. 241.

During Booth's inability to act, which lasted from 1729 till his death, in 1733, Wilks was called upon to play two of his parts, *Jaffier*, and *Lord Hastings* in "*Jane Shore*." Booth was, at times, in all other respects except his power to go on the stage, in good health, and went amongst the players for his amusement. His curiosity drew him to the playhouse on the nights when Wilks acted these characters, in which himself had appeared with uncommon lustre. All the world admired Wilks, except his brother-manager: amidst the repeated bursts of applause which he extorted, Booth, alone continued silent.



Wilks, from his first setting out, certainly formed his manner of acting upon the model of Mountfort ; as Booth did his on that of Betterton. But "*haud passibus æquis*:" I cannot say either of them ever came up to their original. Wilks had not that easy regulated behaviour, nor the harmonious elocution of the one, nor Booth that conscious aspect of intelligence, nor requisite variation of voice, that made every line the other spoke seem his own natural, self-delivered sentiment : yet there is still room for great commendation of both the first mentioned ; which will not be so much diminished in my having said they were only excelled by such predecessors, as it will be raised in venturing to affirm, it will be a longer time before any successors will come near them. Thus one of the greatest praises given to Virgil is that, no successor in poetry came so near him, as he himself did to Homer.

Though the majority of public auditors are but bad judges of theatrical action, and are often deceived into their approbation of what has no solid pretence to it ; yet, as there are no other appointed judges to appeal to, and as every single spectator has a right to be one of them, their sentence will be definitive, and the merit of an actor must, in some degree, be weighed by it : by this law, then, Wilks was pronounced an excellent actor ; which, if the few true judges did not allow him to be, they were, at least, too candid to slight, or discourage him. Booth and he were actors so directly opposite in their manner, that if either of them could have borrowed a little of the other's fault, they would both have been improved by it : if Wilks had sometimes too violent a vivacity, Booth as often contented himself with too grave a dignity :\* the latter

\* This attribute of Booth, which he possessed to a remarkable degree, is thus instanced by Mr. Victor .

seemed too much to heave up his words, as the other to dart them to the ear with too quick and sharp a vehemence: thus Wilks would too frequently break into the time and measure of the harmony, by too many spirited accents in one line; and Booth, by too solemn a regard to harmony, would as often lose the necessary spirit of it: so that, as I have observed, could we have sometimes raised the one and sunk the other, they had both been nearer to the mark. Yet this could not be always objected to them: they had their intervals of unexceptionable excellence, that more than balanced their errors. The masterpiece of Booth was *Othello*.\* there he was most in character, and seemed

His entrance, his walking up to the throne, his manner of saluting the ambassador, his descending, his leaving the stage, though circumstances of a very common nature in theatrical performances, yet were executed by him with a grandeur not to be described, and never failed meeting with distinguished applause.

\* “To attempt to give the reader a slight drawing of my favourite departed actor, I should proceed as follows :

He was of middle stature,—five feet eight—his form inclined to be athletic, though nothing clumsy or heavy. His air and deportment [were] naturally graceful; he had a marking eye, and a manly sweetness in his countenance; his voice was completely harmonious, from the softness of the flute, to the extent of the trumpet; his attitudes were all picturesque; he was noble in his designs, and happy in his execution.

It was this actor's peculiar felicity, (writes Aaron Hill) to be heard and seen the same, whether as the pleased, the grieved, the pitying, the reproachful, or the angry. One would almost be tempted to borrow the aid of a very bold figure, and, to express this excellence the more significantly, beg permission to affirm, that the blind might have seen him in his voice, and the deaf have heard him in his visage.

As to his abilities, he was an excellent scholar, and had a fine taste for poetry, painting, and statuary; of this he has left us eminent proof. I will not enlarge on the various characters in which

not more to animate or please himself in it, than his spectators. It is true, he owed his last and highest advancement

he excelled, and therefore shall only observe, that in *Othello* he has left the strongest impression on me.

Let us consider this character, as inimitably drawn by the author, where all the various passions of the soul are called forth. *Othello's* love is excessive, his rage tempestuous, and his grief agonising. In the first capital scene, *Iago* works *Othello* into jealousy, and takes his leave as follows :

—————In the meantime,  
Let me be thought too busy in my fears,  
As worthy cause I have to fear I am,  
And hold her free, I do beseech your honour.

OTH. Fear not my government.

IAG. I once more take my leave.

[Exit.

OTH. This fellow's of exceeding honesty,  
And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,  
Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard,  
Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings,  
I'd whistle her off, and let her down the wind,  
To prey on fortune. Haply, for I am black,  
And have not those soft parts of conversation  
That chamberers have,—or for I am declin'd  
Into the vale of years—Yet that's not much—  
She's gone ; I am abus'd ; and my relief  
Must be to loathe her. O the curse of marriage !  
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,  
And not their appetites ! I had rather be a toad,  
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,  
Than keep a corner in the thing I love  
For others' uses.—Look where she comes !—\*

DESDEMONA enters.

If she be false, O then heav'n mocks itself !—  
I'll not believe it.

I look upon this soliloquy to be the touchstone for every new

\* This hemistich is a deviation from the right reading, which stands thus :

Desdemona comes :

The correction, of course, will be applied to the same error in a future instance.

to his acting *Cato* ; but it was the novelty, and critical appearance of that character, that chiefly swelled the torrent

actor. When *Iago* had left him, after a long pause, the eye kept looking after him, Booth spoke the following remark in a low tone of voice :

This fellow's of exceeding honesty,  
And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,  
Of human dealings.

Then a pause, the look starting into anger :

—————If I do find her haggard,  
Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings,  
I'd whistle her off, and let her down the wind,  
To prey on fortune.

A long pause, as if to ruminate :

—————Haply, for I am black,  
And have not those soft parts of conversation  
That chamberers have,—or for I am declin'd  
Into the vale of years—Yet that's not much—

After a pause, the following start of violent passion :

She's gone ; I am abus'd ; and my relief  
Must be to loathe her. O the curse of marriage !  
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,  
And not their appetites !

What follows in a quicker, contemptuous tone :

—————I'd rather be a toad,  
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,  
Than keep a corner in the thing I love  
For others' uses.

A look of amazement, seeing *Desdemona* coming :

—————Look where she comes !

A short pause, the countenance and voice softened :

If she be false, O then heav'n mocks itself !—  
I'll not believe it.

In this soliloquy the transitions are frequent, and require such judicious pauses, such alteration of tones and attitudes, such corresponding looks, that no actor, since Booth, has been quite complete in it.”—“ History of the Theatres ;” vol. 2, p. 7.

of his applause: for let the sentiments of a declaiming patriot have all the sublimity that poetry can raise them to; let them be delivered, too, with the utmost grace and dignity of elocution that can recommend them to the auditor; yet this is but one light, wherein the excellence of an actor can shine; but in *Othello* we may see him in the variety of nature: there the actor is carried through the different accidents of domestic happiness and misery; occasionally torn and tortured by the most distracting passion that can raise terror or compassion in the spectator. Such are the characters that a master actor would delight in; and, therefore, in *Othello* I may safely aver that Booth showed himself thrice the actor, that he could in *Cato*. And yet his merit in acting *Cato* need not be diminished by this comparison.

Wilks often regretted that, in tragedy, he had not the full and strong voice of Booth, to command and grace his periods with: but Booth used to say that, if his ear had been equal to it, Wilks had voice enough to have shown himself a much better tragedian. Now though there might be some truth in this, yet these two actors were of so mixed a merit, that, even in tragedy, the superiority was not always on the same side: in sorrow, tenderness, or resignation, Wilks plainly had the advantage, and seemed more pathetically to feel, look, and express his calamity: but in the more turbulent transports of the heart, Booth again bore the palm, and left all competitors behind him. A fact, perhaps, will set this difference in a clearer light. I have formerly seen Wilks act *Othello*,\* and Booth the *Earl of Es-*

\* Wilks made his first appearance as *Othello*, on Thursday, the 22nd of June, 1710, and, as we gather from the "Tattler," (1) excited unusual curiosity by his assumption of a character so opposite to

*sex*,\* in which they both miscarried : neither the exclamatory rage and jealousy of the one, nor the plaintive distresses of the other, were happily executed, or became either of them ; though in the contrary characters they were both excellent.

When an actor becomes and naturally looks the character he stands in, I have often observed it to have had as fortunate an effect, and as much recommended him to the approbation of the common auditors, as the most correct or judicious utterance of the sentiments : this was strongly visible in the favourable reception Wilks met with in *Hamlet*, where, I own, the half of what he spoke was as painful to my ear, as every line that came from Betterton was charming ; and yet it is not impossible, could they have come to a poll, but Wilks might have had a majority of admirers : however, such a division had been no proof that the pre-eminence had not still remained in Betterton ; and if I should add that Booth, too, was behind Betterton in *Othello*, it would be saying no more than Booth himself had judgment and candour enough to know and confess. And if both he and Wilks are allowed, in the two above-mentioned characters, a second place to so great a master as Betterton, it will be a rank of praise that the best actors, since my time, might have been proud of.

I am now come towards the end of that time, through his common line of acting. Steele remarks, in a subsequent part of this paper, (2) that Wilks failed in no part of *Othello*, but where he became the copyist of Betterton.

\* Wilks's merit in the *Earl of Essex* was so great, that Steele assures us his person and behaviour had " no small share in conducing to the popularity of the play." (1) When Booth played this part I cannot ascertain.

(2) No. 201.

(1) No. 14.

which our affairs had long gone forward in a settled course of prosperity. From the visible errors of former managements, we had, at last, found the necessary means to bring our private laws and orders into the general observance and approbation of our society : diligence and neglect were under an equal eye ; the one never failed of its reward, and the other, by being very rarely excused, was less frequently committed. You are now to consider us in our height of favour, and so much in fashion with the politer part of the town, that our house, every Saturday, seemed to be the appointed assembly of the first ladies of quality : of this, too, the common spectators were so well apprised, that for twenty years successively, on that day, we scarcely ever failed of a crowded audience ; for which occasion we particularly reserved our best plays, acted in the best manner we could give them.

Among our many necessary reformatiions, what not a little preserved to us the regard of our auditors, was the decency of our clear stage ; from whence we had now, for many years, shut out those idle gentlemen who seemed more delighted to be pretty objects themselves, than capable of any pleasure from the play ; who took their daily stands, where they might best elbow the actor, and come in for their share of the auditor's attention. In many a laboured scene of the warmest humour, and of the most affecting passion, have I seen the best actors disconcerted, while these buzzing mosquitoes have been fluttering round their eyes and ears. How was it possible an actor, so embarrassed, should keep his impatience from entering into that different temper which his personated character might require him to be master of ?\*

\* In the early part of the eighteenth century, the disorders created by this interruption were carried to such excess, that soldiers were stationed on the stage to prevent it. (1)

(1). " Tattler ;" No. 19.

Future actors may perhaps wish I would set this grievance in a stronger light ; and, to say the truth, where auditors are ill-bred, it cannot well be expected that actors should be polite. Let me, therefore, show how far an artist, in any science, is apt to be hurt by any sort of inattention to his performance.

While the famous Corelli, at Rome, was playing some musical composition of his own, to a select company in the private apartment of his patron-cardinal, he observed, in the height of his harmony, his eminence was engaging in a detached conversation ; upon which he suddenly stopped short, and gently laid down his instrument : the cardinal, surprised at the unexpected cessation, asked him if a string was broken ; to which Corelli, in an honest conscience of what was due to his music, replied, “No, sir, I was only afraid I interrupted business.” His eminence, who knew that a genius could never show itself to advantage where it had not its proper regards, took this reproof in good part, and broke off his conversation, to hear the whole concerto played over again.

Another story will let us see what effect a mistaken offence of this kind had upon the French theatre ; which was told me by a gentleman of the long robe, then at Paris, and who was himself the innocent author of it. At the tragedy of “Zaire,” while the celebrated Mademoiselle Gaussin\* was delivering a soliloquy, this gentleman was seized with a sudden fit of coughing, which gave the actress some surprise and interruption ; and his fit increasing, she was forced

\* Marie Magdeleine Gaussin made her débüt upon the Parisian boards, as *Junie* in “*Britannicus*,” on the 28th of April, 1731. She was long held in the highest estimation for her pathetic powers, till, having married a dancer named Taolaigo in 1758, she soon afterwards withdrew from theatrical life.



to stand silent so long, that it drew the eyes of the uneasy audience upon him ; when a French gentleman, leaning forward to him, asked him if this actress had given him any particular offence, that he took so public an occasion to resent it? The English gentleman, in the utmost surprise, assured him, so far from it, that he was a particular admirer of her performance ; that his malady was his real misfortune, and if he apprehended any return of it, he would rather quit his seat than disoblige either the actress or the audience.

This public decency in their theatre I have myself seen carried so far, that a gentleman in their second loge, or middle-gallery, being observed to sit forward himself, while a lady sate behind him, a loud number of voices called out to him from the pit, "Place à la dame ! Place à la dame!" When the person so offending, either not apprehending the meaning of the clamour, or possibly being some John Trott who feared no man alive, the noise was continued for several minutes ; nor were the actors, though ready on the stage, suffered to begin the play, till this unbred person was laughed out of his seat, and had placed the lady before him.

Whether this politeness, observed at plays, may be owing to their clime, their complexion, or their government, is of no great consequence ; but, if it is to be acquired, methinks it is pity our accomplished countrymen, who, every year, import so much of this nation's gawdy garniture, should not, in this long course of our commerce with them, have brought over a little of their theatrical good-breeding, too.

I have been the more copious upon this head, that it might be judged how much it stood us upon\* to have got

\* This mode of expression is now obsolete. It occurs very often in our early dramatists.

rid of those improper spectators I have been speaking of: for whatever regard we might draw by keeping them at a distance from our stage, I had observed, while they were admitted behind our scenes, we but too often showed them the wrong side of our tapestry; and that many a tolerable actor was the less valued, when it was known what ordinary stuff he was made of.

Among the many more disagreeable distresses that are almost unavoidable in the government of a theatre, those we so often met with from the persecution of bad authors were what we could never entirely get rid of. But let us state both our cases, and then see where the justice of the complaint lies. 'Tis true, when an ingenious indigent had taken, perhaps, a whole summer's pains, *invitâ Minervâ*, to heap up a pile of poetry into the likeness of a play, and found, at last, the gay promise of his winter's support was rejected and abortive, a man almost ought to be a poet himself to be justly sensible of his distress. Then, indeed, great allowances ought to be made for the severe reflections he might naturally throw upon those pragmatical actors who had no sense or taste of good writing. And yet if his relief was only to be had by his imposing a bad play upon a good set of actors, methinks the charity that first looks at home has as good an excuse for its coldness, as the unhappy object of it had a plea for his being relieved at their expense. But immediate want was not always confessed their motive for writing; fame, honour, and Parnassian glory, had sometimes taken a romantic turn in their heads; and then they gave themselves the air of talking to us in a higher strain: "Gentlemen were not to be so treated; the stage was like to be finely governed, when actors pretended to be judges of authors," &c. But, "Dear gentlemen, if they were good actors, why not? How should they have been able to act, or rise to any excellence, if you suppose them not to feel

or understand what you offered them? Would you have reduced them to the mere mimicry of parrots and monkeys, that can only prate, and play a great many pretty tricks, without reflection? Or, how are you sure your friend, the infallible judge, to whom you read your fine piece, might be sincere in the praises he gave it? Or, indeed, might not you have thought the best judge a bad one, if he had disliked it? Consider, too, how possible it might be that a man of sense would not care to tell you a truth, he was sure you would not believe; and, if neither Dryden, Congreve, Steele, Addison, nor Farquhar, (if you please) ever made any complaint of their incapacity to judge, why is the world to believe the slights you have met with from them, are either undeserved or particular? Indeed, indeed, I am not conscious that we ever did you, or any of your fraternity, the least injustice." Yet this was not all we had to struggle with; to supersede our right of rejecting the recommendation, or rather imposition of some great persons, whom it was not prudence to disoblige, they sometimes came in, with a high hand, to support their pretensions; and then, *coute qui coute*, acted it-must be. So, when the short life of this wonderful nothing was over, the actors were perhaps abused in a preface, for obstructing the success of it,\* and the town publicly damned us for our private civility.

I cannot part with these fine gentlemen authors, without mentioning a ridiculous *disgraccia* that befel one of them, many years ago: this solemn bard, who, like *Bays*, only wrote for fame and reputation, on the second day's public triumph of his muse, marching in a stately full-bottomed

\* Such was the case in Dennis's "Comic Gallant," where one of the actors, whom I believe to be Bullock, is most severely handled.

periwig into the lobby of the house, with a lady of condition in his hand, when raising his voice to the *Sir Fopling* sound, that *became the mouth of a man of quality*, and calling out—"Hey, box-keeper! where is my Lady Such-a-one's servant?" was unfortunately answered, by honest John Trott, which then happened to be the box-keeper's real name, "Sir, we have dismissed; there was not company enough to pay candles." In which mortal astonishment, it may be sufficient to leave him. And yet had the actors refused this play, what resentment might have been thought too severe for them?

Thus was our administration often censured for accidents, which were not in our power to prevent: a possible case in the wisest governments. If, therefore, some plays have been preferred to the stage that were never fit to have been seen there, let this be our best excuse for it. And yet, if the merit of our rejecting the many bad plays that pressed hard upon us, were weighed against the few that were thus imposed upon us, our conduct, in general, might have more amendments of the stage to boast of, than errors to answer for. But it is now time to drop the curtain.

During our four last years, there happened so very little unlike what has been said before, that I shall conclude with barely mentioning those unavoidable accidents that drew on our dissolution. The first, that for some years had led the way to greater, was the continued ill state of health that rendered Booth\* incapable of appearing on the stage.

\* Barton Booth was descended from an antient and honourable family, long settled in the county palatine of Lancaster, and allied to the Earls of Warrington, upon whose barony of Delamere the subject of this article had a contingent claim. He was the third and youngest son of John Booth, Esq., a gentleman who having

The next was the death of Mrs. Oldfield,\* which happened on the 23d of October, 1730. About the same time, too,

impaired his estate by mismanagement, left the country to live in Westminster, where he hoped, by interest and application, to have his children provided for. Barton, who was born in 1681, and had just attained his third year at the time of this journey, was sent to Westminster-school in 1690, at that time governed by the celebrated Dr. Busby, under whom the rudiments of his education were received. Booth soon evinced a strong tendency to learning in general, and before his twelfth year was completed, gained the notice of even Busby himself, by the extent and precocity of his attainments. With Horace, for whom he felt a strong predilection, he was remarkably familiar, and delighted much in the study and recitation of passages from the other Latin poets; which, by constant application he succeeded in imprinting upon his memory. Shakspeare and Milton were also among the bards from whose pages he declaimed, and such was the melody of his voice, and the elegance of his manner, that these little exercises of inherent genius became the admiration of the whole school.

In consequence of this superior talent, when, according to annual custom, a Latin play was to be performed, young Booth was selected for the capital part, which happened to be *Pamphilus*, in the "Andria," and so powerful was the impression which his efforts created, that Dr. Busby, who held theatrical accomplishments in high esteem, adopted the general opinion, and honoured his pupil with unbounded applause. The success of this effort, as Booth freely confessed, filled him with ambition to become an actor, and though his father intended him for the pulpit, he was sedulously bent upon the means of accomplishing this desire. At the age of seventeen, and as the time arrived for his removal to the university, he determined to run any risk, rather than embrace a line of life so opposite to the inclinations of his genius, and the impulse of his temper; he therefore applied to Mr. Betterton for an appearance at his theatre, but this applica-

Mrs. Porter, then in her highest reputation for tragedy, was lost to us, by the misfortune of a dislocated limb, from

tion was declined, from a fear of offending the noble family to which he was allied. Booth, upon this refusal, becoming acquainted with Ashbury, the Dublin manager, who was then probably in London, looking out for recruits, abandoned the prospect which lay before him, and went over to Ireland, a needy and friendless adventurer, in June, 1698.

Ambition, whatever shape it assumes, has in general some redeeming feature, though, in its noblest form, but a wild heaping up of many faculties for the consummation of a single object. Its results are like the huge Egyptian pyramids, whose materials, if wisely dispensed, would have edified much grander monuments of the wealth and power by which they were raised. Such is ambition in its fairest aspect; but when it goads us into enterprises of a mean or derogatory sort, it becomes an apostasy from sense and virtue, and merits the scorn of all who can trace its abject use, or resist its successful splendour. We have seen a being like Booth, gifted with rare endowments, improved by liberal education, and possessed of great influence, forsaking the path that conducted to honour, and devoting his fine qualities to the illustration of an art that none but the lowest creatures of his kind could encourage and reward; what then is the human mind thus abated in its warmth, and divested of its lustre? It is "a god kissing carrion;" an orb that has rolled from its native circuit, "swings blind and blackening in the moonless air," and ceases to claim the reverence it so long commanded.

Booth made his first appearance on the Dublin stage as *Oroonoko*, a part in which he came off with every testimonial of approbation. An odd accident attended this performance. It being very warm weather, as he waited to go on in the last scene of the play, he inadvertently wiped his face, so that on entering, to use his own words, he had the appearance of a chimney-sweeper. Mr. Ashbury, who had given Booth some valuable instruction in this

the overturning of a chaise. And our last stroke was the death of Wilks, in September,\* the year following, 1731.

arduous character, was so pleased by the success which attended it, that he made him a present of five guineas, and opportune indeed was this donation, for Booth's finances, at the time, were reduced to less than his last shilling. Here he continued two years, in the course of which he reconciled himself to his friends, and rose to considerable eminence; but growing dissatisfied with his situation, he returned to England, and played in a country company. Fired by the praise of several English gentlemen who had seen him act in Ireland, his chief object was to make a trial of his talents upon the London boards, and as soon therefore, there is reason to suppose, as circumstances would permit, he endeavoured to realise this intention. By the assistance of old Boman, and as a further step towards his success, under the auspices of Lord Fitzharding, he was introduced to Betterton, who, with great kindness took him under his care, and augured sanguinely of those powers which Booth was soon enabled to unfold. He made his first appearance, about Christmas, 1700, (1) as *Maximus*, in "Valentinian," and though associated in this play with Betterton, Verbruggen, and Mrs. Barry, the great theatrical luminaries of the age, his merit was conspicuous, and his success decisive. Booth's school-fellow, Rowe, soon after this produced his tragedy of the "Ambitious Step-mother," in which the part of *Artaban* tended to establish the reputation he had already acquired.

While Booth was gradually advancing to the pinnacle of favour, the stage experienced a variety of those changes, to which, while governed by individual caprice, it will always be subjected. There is no situation so arduous, in the whole circle of public amusements, as the dictatorship of our metropolitan drama; and

(1) Certainly *before* 1701, to which the "Biographia Dramatica" allots it, because Rowe's "Ambitious Step-mother," in which Booth played *Artaban*, was published, according to this very book, in 1700.

Notwithstanding such irreparable losses whether, when these favourite actors were no more to be had, their suc-

yet when we look to the manner in which this seat has been generally filled, it would seem to be one of the easiest upon which imbecility has ever reposed. These convulsions at length divided Booth from his venerable preceptor, and when the chief actors at Drury-lane theatre, exhausted by the tyranny of Rich, sought an asylum elsewhere, Booth, for which Cibber reproaches him, continued firm to his early master, till a last stroke of severity put an end to the dominion he had so long abused. Unworthy motives have been imputed to Booth for the manner in which he acted, and Cibber, who asperses with impunity, has been among the foremost in fixing this imputation. When, however, it is remembered that Wilks, who became assuming and intractable (2) whenever his authority was disputed, had worried Booth for nine years, by putting Mills before him (3) in every character to which, from conscious superiority, he was intitled, his eagerness to shake off the yoke that Wilks had imposed upon him, will justify a more exceptionable step than that of adhering to the patentee in the midst of his accumulated distresses. The actors by whom Dogget, Wilks, and Cibber were followed, fled, like the vermin from *Prospero's* boat, upon instinct, without any view to justify their support, or any motive to vindicate their desertion. They were blown away like down from the thistle, which is scattered by the first blast that assails it; and in heaping obloquy upon the conduct of Booth, they hoped to lessen the altitude of their own dishonour. Booth most probably saw and acknowledged the tyranny of which his associates complained; but he also felt the usurpations of Wilks, by whose harsh and arrogant measures no member of the company but himself was even par-

(2) See Cibber's own admission of this truth, on p. 407.

(3) It is admitted, at p. 466, that Mills had no pretensions to cope with Booth as an actor.



cessors might not be better borne with than they could possibly have hoped while the former were in being; or

tially injured. His alliance with the patentee was therefore more an act of necessity than choice, and one for which the rude spirit of Wilks is alone responsible.

Booth continued to hold his high rank in Drury-lane theatre after the possession of it was obtained by Collier, and the confederated actors. When the "*Roscus Anglicanus*" was printed in 1708, Downs, who certainly took most of his tones from public opinion, particularised Booth as a "complete tragedian," though Wilks, Mills, and Cibber still excluded him from many opportunities of displaying his merit, by engrossing those parts in which he had a right to appear. Philips's vile copy of Racine, ycleped the "*Distressed Mother*," supplied Booth with a signal occasion to manifest his superiority, though the part of *Pyrrhus*, in which his triumph was achieved, is one that even secondary actors have since despised. Such was the awful majesty of his deportment, that his entrance, his walking up to the throne, his salutation of the ambassador, his descent from the throne, and his departure from the stage, though circumstances of a very common sort, in theatrical performances, were yet executed with inconceivable grandeur, and welcomed by tumultuous applause.

Accident sometimes does more for individuals than all the force of merit, and all the prudence of design. The stage is so peculiarly exposed to this glorious uncertainty, that many actors, like *Malvolia*, have "greatness thrust upon them," not only without the slightest desert, but even the remotest expectation. Such was the fate of Booth, who found himself suddenly exalted to a height he had long been qualified to attain, by causes over which no visible agency could exercise its controul. In the year 1712, Mr. Addison produced his play of "*Cato*," a frigid and declamatory work, exhibiting some popular notions of government, and embellished with a few patches of poetry. So heated was the public mind at this juncture by political incendiaries, that "*Cato*" fired

that the generality of spectators, from their want of taste, were easier to be pleased than the few that knew better ;

the train of controversy at both ends, and was eagerly caught at, alike by whigs and tories, as a test of their constitutional opinions. Booth was luckily the prime bearer of this mighty brand, which "lighted him the way" to thickened honours and redoubled emolument. He received a handsome present from the tory supporters of "Cato," with a suitable message, for the zeal his performance had displayed ; and the managers evinced their sense of his superlative merit, by making him a similar donation. But, though "Glamis and Cawdor" had been gained, the "greatest was behind." Lord Bolingbroke, between whom and Booth there reigned the most familiar intercourse, procured a special order from Queen Ann for his admission into the management with which Wilks, Dogget, and Cibber were invested. "If you'd dive into a man's heart," says Vanbrugh, "you must enter into his pleasures ;" and this maxim will perhaps account for the close intimacy which subsisted between the peer and the player. Our apologist, who is always ingenious in the fabrication of a bad argument, presumes that Booth was merely brought forward to show that the stage possessed no property but what the crown, at its pleasure, might dispose of ; and if the license under which Cibber and his companions managed was only granted during pleasure, what, in equity, was to hinder the crown from disposing of such property as the license might be termed ? Cibber admits (4) that the only title of his colleagues and himself to the pre-eminence they enjoyed, was the superiority of their professional merit, and he owns on a subsequent page (5) that Booth had also a "manifest merit," at the time his elevation to their level was imperiously recommended. Now, why the very cause which qualified Wilks, Dogget, and

(4) See p. 387.

(5) See p. 406.

or that, at worst, our actors were still preferable to any other company of the several, then subsisting; or, to

Cibber, should not qualify Booth, it is difficult to understand. They had "no visible competitors on the stage," in 1709, when this license was granted, but when, in 1712, the name of Booth became as glorious as their own, what was to tie up the hands of their royal mistress from receiving him into that favour which his future associates had duly experienced? It is Cibber, and not the crown, that would make a property of the license; he is for considering it as an inalienable possession in his own case, though not so in the case of Rich; while the crown, looking only to principle, and not to persons, divides its benevolence with Booth, upon the very grounds that had directed its patronage to Wilks, Dogget, and Cibber.

Mr. Booth, in 1704, married Miss Barkham, the daughter of a Norfolk baronet, who died without issue about six years after their union. At her death he engaged in an amour with Susanna Mountfort, the only child of Mrs. Verbruggen, by her first husband, who deposited property amounting to three thousand two hundred pounds, (6) in his hands, which, at the dissolution of

(6) The "Biographia Dramatica," by medium of Mr. Jones, says "eight thousand pounds," which it also assures us, most sagaciously, was a "considerable" sum. Now as the fact depends upon a deed of release signed by Susanna Mountfort, in June, 1718, I will print a passage from it, to show the accuracy of *my* statement:

"Whereas I Susanna Mountfort, of the parish of St. Giles', in the county of Middlesex, single woman, did some time past deposit in the hands of Barton Booth, of St. Giles-in-the-fields, in the said county of Middlesex, gent., several exchequer and bank bills, amounting in value to the sum of *three thousand and two hundred pounds*; now know all men by these presents that he, the said Barton Booth, hath this day delivered unto me, the said Susanna Mountfort, all and every of the same exchequer and bank bills, so by me formerly deposited with him, the said Barton Booth, as aforesaid, and that the same now are of the full value of *three thousand and two hundred pounds*."—

whatever cause it might be imputed, our audiences were far less abated than our apprehensions had suggested. So

their intimacy, in June 1718, was most honourably restored. Booth's conduct in the course of this affair was cruelly traduced; he had not only injured Mrs. Mountfort, it was said, in her feelings, but her fortune, though a formal release, under her own hand, exculpated him from so odious a charge. At the time this attachment commenced, Booth wanted money to purchase the "stock" of his new associate-managers, upon which, as Cibber leads us to conclude, they had set "a good round value; (7) and hence; perhaps, the cause of Booth's accepting the deposit with which he was intrusted.

In the year 1719, Mr. Booth, who seems to have been a libertine and a sensualist, gave his hand to Miss Santlow, a strumpet of condition, who had just stepped from "the rank sweat of an enseamed bed," where two successive, and perhaps rival, possessors, had revelled in her charms. Booth it is said, was warned against the infamy of this connection, but faced it out, if Dennis's assertion (8) be true and applicable, by protesting that he liked his bride the better for her want of virtue. It is impossible to argue upon taste so depraved, or falsehood so audacious; but Booth must submit to at least a choice of evils, and be treated as either a dolt, upon whom the first charm of woman had been wasted, or a knave who concealed his dislike of immodesty beneath an affectation of indifference. Miss Santlow was wealthy, and in her wealth perhaps consisted the whole secret of Booth's abominable declaration.

This excellent actor continued to perform his theatrical duties without intermission, till the year 1727, when, early in the acting season, he was seized with a fever, which lasted six-and-forty days,

(7) See page 406.

(8) In his first letter on the "Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar."

that, though it began to grow late in life with me, having still health and strength enough to have been as useful on

and though his health was partially restored by the skill and care of his medical advisers, yet he never enjoyed it sufficiently for accustomed exertion. He returned to the stage, in his favourite part of *Pyrrhus*, about the middle of the season, (9) and though reduced in flesh, seemed to have lost none of that spirit and vigour by which his performances were distinguished. The house was crowded, and the applause universal.

Soon after the accession of George the Second, "King Henry the Eighth" was revived, with a pompous scene of Anna Bullen's coronation, and in this play Mr. Booth performed *King Henry* more than twenty successive times. From fatigue, he fell into a relapse of his disorder, which came back with such violence, that he was compelled to relinquish the character of *Julio*, in Theobald's "Double Falsehood," which devolved in consequence upon Williams, who sustained it till the sixth evening, when Booth, at Theobald's solicitation, and with a fatal neglect of his illness, took it upon himself for seven nights, after which he finally withdrew from the audience he had so long, so often, and so largely delighted. (10)

The fever with which Booth was afflicted turned at last to

(9) The "Biographia Dramatica," that happy *melange*, at least in Mr. Jones's hands, of simple ignorance and wilful mistake, says "Booth never appeared again upon the stage,—excepting in the run of a play called the 'Double Falsehood,' brought on the theatre by Mr. Theobald, in 1729, and asserted, but unjustly, to be written by Shakspeare."

(10) This happened in 1728, when Theobald's mystified play was published. "But no," says the "Biographia Dramatica;" it was in "1729," and to prove its veracity, in two other places printeth as follows:

*The Double Falsehood; or, The Distrest Lovers.* Play, 8vo. 1728. Vol. 1, part 2; p. 706.

*The Double Falsehood; or, The Distrest Lovers.* Play, by Lewis Theobald. Acted at Drury-lane. 8vo. 1728. Vol. 2; p. 173.

the stage as ever, I was under no visible necessity of quitting it. But so it happened that our surviving fraternity,

an inveterate jaundice, and by the advice of his physicians, he went to Bath for the benefit of the waters. He staid there nearly three months, but without effect, and then returned to London, from which, fancying that sea-sickness might assist his cure, he embarked, with Mrs. Booth, on a trip to Ostend. After travelling through Flanders to Antwerp, with a design of proceeding into Holland, to consult Dr. Boerhaave, who had been made acquainted with his case, he was compelled to return, his fever raging with such force that he was driven, almost every other day, to keep his bed. Strong hopes, during the year 1731, were entertained of his recovery; and such, indeed, was his convalescence about the period spoken of, that he took a house at Hampstead, and received the visits of his anxious friends. Their expectations, however, were defeated by the virulence of his complaint, which, after many fluctuations of acute pain and bitter disappointment, brought him to the grave on Tuesday, May the 10th, 1733. He was buried at Cowley, near Uxbridge.

The reputation of Mr. Booth is more firm than splendid, for though certainly one of the greatest actors with which our histrionic annals are enriched, he has not been made the subject of consideration or reference, so often as his talents are intitled to require. Some of his admirers have imputed this fact to the very moderate praise bestowed upon him by Cibber, and others deduce it from the satire of Pope, who has noticed him with all the severity of contempt, in his imitations of Horace. His countenance of pantomime (11) has also immortalised him in the

(11) "I remember," says Theophilus Cibber, "being with Mr. Booth at a coffee-house, when a number of gentlemen politely addressed him, and gave him their thanks for the extraordinary pleasure they had received the night before from his excellent acting in the part of *Varanes*. They were unanimous in their almost raptured praises, and as jointly, but gently blamed

having got some chimerical, and, as I thought, unjust notions into their heads, which, though I knew they were

“Dunciad;” but these attacks, though collateral aids, were not the causes of that depression which Booth’s memory has experienced. It should rather be attributed to the want of being frequently seen in parts of importance, which, till placed upon equal terms with the turbulent and haughty Wilks, who so partially favoured his friend Mills, he could never pretend to. Even when admitted to the management, the sway of this imperious coadjutor was not always to be resisted; and Booth, whose natural indolence unfitted

him, for having tacked to so fine a play that senseless stuff, as they were pleased to call it, of ‘Persens and Andromeda,’ &c.; adding, they were much beneath the dignity of the theatre. Mr. Booth frankly answered, that he thought a thin audience was a much greater indignity to the stage than any they mentioned, and a full one most likely to keep up the spirit of the actor, and consequently heighten the representation. He begged them to consider there were many more spectators than men of taste and judgment; and if, by the artifice of a pantomime, they could entice a greater number to partake of the *utile dulci* of a good play than could be drawn without it, he could not see any great harm in it: that as they were performed after the play, they were no interruption to it, and gave the people of fashion an opportunity, if they left the house before the farce began, of getting to their coaches with more ease than if the whole audience poured out together. For his own part, he confessed, he considered profit as well as fame: and as to their plays, even they reaped some advantage from the pantomimes, by adding to the accounts, which enabled the managers to be more expensive in habits, and other decorations of the theatre in general, and to give better encouragement to their performers. He desired them to recollect what sums were expended in operas, how much it was the fashion to subscribe to them, how high were their prices,\* and what a train of nobility and gentry were drawn to them, to the no small prejudice of the playhouse, as appeared by the melancholy testimony of their receipts, till by those auxiliary pantomimes, they not only found their pit and galleries were fuller, but that their boxes made a nobler appearance; and, as Mr. Aaron Hill has justly observed, he could not think it the business of the directors to be wise to empty boxes.”—“Life of Booth,” p. 68.

\* The same as at present.

without much difficulty to be surmounted, I chose not, at my time of day, to enter into new contentions; and, as I

him for intrigue or contention, still permitted Wilks to exercise a part of his injurious authority. From the year 1709, when Mr. Rowe published his edition of Shakspeare, the appearance of that author's plays became more frequent; and Booth, soon after the death of Betterton, profiting by his newly-acquired power, undertook the representation of a few principal parts, and was much admired in them.

It is a singular thing that Garrick, with all the resources of his tragic art, could never exhibit sufficient merit in any branch of passion of which *Othello* is composed, to retain possession of that mighty character. Even Barry, a mere automaton, excelled him most immeasurably in this noble part, and Booth, if the record of his success can be relied on, eclipsed them both, by the fervour of his love, the anguish of his jealousy, and the vehemence of his despair. His dignity and force in the gallant *Antony* were so great, that when Dryden's heavy play was revived in the year 1719, he brought six successive audiences to it, without the help of pantomime or farce; which, at that time, was esteemed an extraordinary attraction. *Hotspur* he is said to have rendered one of the most perfect exhibitions ever witnessed; (12) his excellence

(12) "Booth's *Hotspur*," says Davies, "was, in the opinion of the critics, who saw him in the character, one of the most perfect exhibitions on the stage. His strong, yet harmonious pipe, reached the highest note of exclamatory rage, without hurting the music of its tone. His gesture was ever in unison with his utterance, and his eye constantly combining with both to give a correspondent force to the passion. His tread in this part was quick, yet significant, accompanied with princely grandeur. When Giffard, late manager of the theatre in Goodman's-fields, an actor much favoured by Wilks, on account of paying him that most pleasing of all flattery, an imitation of his manner of acting, was through the interest of his great exemplar, favoured with a benefit, and permitted to act that night the *Prince of Wales*, Booth, who entertained so great a contempt for Wilks in tragedy, and, of consequence, still more despised his



found an inclination in some of them to purchase the whole power of the patent into their own hands, I did my best,

is also celebrated in a long line of diversified characters; and such was the facility of his genius, that he could descend to the most cordial touches of the humourous, (13) or mount to the highest pinnacle of the sublime.

humble imitator, declared, without any ceremony, that he would that night 'let off an Irish actor.' The theatre was extremely crowded, both in the front and on the stage.\* I have heard Mr. Lacy, the late manager, Mr. Victor, and others, who were present, declare, that they never saw so animated a performance, and attended with such loud and repeated plaudits from all parts of the theatre, as Booth's *Hotspur*. Giffard, who was just arrived from the Dublin theatre, honestly owned that he was struck with astonishment, and joined in the general approbation."—"Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. i, p. 222.

(13) "Booth," says Davies, "succeeded Betterton in *Henry the Eighth*, To support the dignity of the prince, and yet retain that vein of humour which pervades this character, requires great caution, and without particular attention, *Harry* will be manufactured into a royal bully or ridiculous buffoon. Booth was particularly happy in preserving the true spirit of the part through the whole play. Mr. Macklin, who had the good fortune to see him several times in *Harry*, has declared that he shone in the character with particular lustre."—"Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. i, p. 355.

\* It was a custom in the London Theatres, till about the middle of the last century, at particular benefits, to erect an amphitheatre across the stage, from one front wing to the other, with rows of benches, more or less in number, as occasion required, which not only destroyed the effect, but greatly incommoded the business of the performance. In some instances the seats of these temporary edifices rose one above the other, higher than the trees, and hats and bonnets were beheld fastened to the clouds. A single entrance was left upon each side next the stage-door, which was often choked up with bystanders, and the feats of Bow-worth-field, amidst drums, trumpets, battle-axes, and spears, were enacted between two audiences, where *Richard* spoke his last soliloquy, and his dying lines, upon a carpet no bigger than a table-cloth.

These inconveniencies never failed to give disgust to those who came with an intention to be amused, and could yield pleasure to none but the actor, for whose benefit they were tolerated, and those particular friends, who assembled solely to serve him. Bickerings frequently arose at the commencement of the play, between the audiences before and behind the curtain; thence, upon other less attractive performances, arose a practice of inserting at the bottom of the advertisements and play-bills:

N. B. *There will be no building on the stage.*

while I staid with them, to make it worth their while to come up to my price ; and then patiently sold out my share

The tribute paid by Mr. Hill to the talents of this actor, is worthy of his reputation as a candid and discerning critic ; it was addressed, for publication, to one of Booth's biographers, and forms an eligible supplement to this vindication of his fame :

To Mr. Victor.

SIR,

I will comply with your desire in as brief a manner as I am able, and send you my sentiments concerning what was chiefly remarkable in Mr. Booth, as an actor.

Two advantages distinguished him in the strongest light from the rest of his fraternity : he had learning to understand perfectly whatever it was his part to speak, and judgment to know how far it agreed or disagreed with his character. Hence arose a peculiar grace, which was visible to every spectator ; though few were at the pains of examining into the cause of their pleasure. He could soften and slide over, with a kind of elegant negligence, the improprieties in a part he acted ; while, on the contrary, he would dwell with energy upon the beauties, as if he exerted a latent spirit which had been kept back for such an occasion, that he might alarm, awaken, and transport in those places only, where the dignity of his own good sense could be supported by that of his author.

A little reflection upon this remarkable quality, will help us to account for that manifest languor which has sometimes been observed in his action, and which was generally, though I think falsely, imputed to the natural indolence of his temper.

For the same reason, though in the customary rounds of his business he would condescend to some parts in comedy, he seldom appeared in any of them with much advantage to his character. The passions which he found in comedy were not strong enough to excite his fire ; and what seemed want of qualification, was only absence of impression.

He had a talent of discovering the passions, where they lay hid in some celebrated parts, by the injudicious practice of other actors ; when he had discovered, he soon grew able to express them ; and his secret for attaining this great lesson of the theatre, was an adaption of his look to his voice ; by which artful imitation of nature, the variation in the sound of his words gave propriety to every change in his countenance. So that it was Mr. Booth's

to the best bidder, wishing the crew I had left in the vessel a good voyage.

peculiar felicity to be heard and seen the same, whether as the pleased, the grieved, the pitying, the reproachful, or the angry. One would almost be tempted to borrow the aid of a very bold figure, and, to express this excellence the more significantly, beg permission to affirm, that the blind might have seen him in his voice, and the deaf have heard him in his visage.

His gesture, or, as it is commonly called, his action, was but the result and necessary consequence of his dominion over his voice and countenance : for having, by concurrence of two such causes, impressed his imagination with the stamp and spirit of a passion, his nerves obeyed the impulse by a kind of natural dependency, and relaxed or braced successively into all that fine expressiveness with which he painted what he spoke, without restraint or affectation.

I can scarce forbear to be fuller on so inviting a subject ; but I consider the size of the treatise you are about to publish, and shall add nothing but the good wishes with which I am,

Sir,

Your most obedient, humble servant,

July 8, 1733.

A. HILL.

A monument has been raised to the memory of Booth, in Westminster-abbey, by the pride, or what Davies calls the “ piety,” of his wife, who suffered forty years to elapse before she gave this proof of conjugal veneration. A better monument than marble is found in the following anecdote.

Booth was valued and beloved by the players as a companion, who mixed in their society, and promoted their interests. When Harper remonstrated with him that Shepherd’s income was larger than his by twenty shillings a-week, though he presumed that his own diligence and utility were equal ; Booth said in reply, assenting to the truth of what he had affirmed, “ Suppose now, Harper, we should put you on a level, by reducing his salary to yours ? ” — “ By no means, sir,” said the other, “ I would not injure Mr.

What commotions the stage fell into the year following, or from what provocations the greatest part of the actors

Shepherd for the world ; I only want, by your favour, sir, honestly to serve myself." The manager said no more, but Harper's allowance was instantly raised.

\* Ann Oldfield was born in the year 1683, and would have possessed a tolerable fortune, had not her father, a captain in the army, expended it at a very early period. In consequence of this deprivation, she went to reside with her aunt, who kept the Mitre tavern, in St. James's-market, where Farquhar, the dramatist, one day heard her reading a few passages from Beaumont and Fletcher's "Scornful Lady," in which she manifested such spirit, ease, and humour, that being struck by her evident advantages for the stage, he framed an excuse to enter the room, a little parlour behind the bar, in which Miss Nancy was sitting. If the mere indications of genius had thus exercised such power upon this young and gallant Hibernian, we may easily guess at their force when coupled with the personal beauty which Mrs. Oldfield at this juncture displayed. Captain Farquhar, there is ample reason to suppose, fell a victim to her charms, and it was, perhaps, from a desire of possessing what the theatre would give him means to attempt, that he urged this lovely woman to try her talents in the path he not only felt bound to suggest, but had sufficient influence to open. He pressed Mrs. Oldfield to resume the task his presence had suspended : but though she merrily said, soon afterwards, "I longed to be at it, and only wanted a little decent intreaty," it was not without much trouble on Farquhar's part that she was persuaded to comply.

Vanbrugh, who frequented the house, and was known to Mrs. Oldfield's mother, received a communication from that lady of the very great warmth with which his friend Farquhar had extolled her daughter's abilities. Vanbrugh, who seems to have been a zealous and sincere friend to all by whom his assistance was courted, im-

revolted, and set up for themselves in the little house in the Haymarket, lies not within the promise of my title-page

mediately addressed himself to our heroine, and having ascertained that her fancy tended to parts of a sprightly nature, he recommended her to Rich, the manager of Drury-lane, by whom she was immediately engaged, at a salary of fifteen shillings *per* week. Her qualifications soon rendered her conspicuous among the young actresses of that time, and a man of rank being pleased to express himself in her favour, Mr. Rich increased her weekly terms to the sum of twenty shillings.

The rise of Mrs. Oldfield was gradual but secure, and soon after the death of Mrs. Verbruggen she succeeded to the line of comic parts so happily held by that popular actress. Her *Lady Betty Modish*, in 1705, before which she was little known, and barely suffered, discovered accomplishments the public were not apprised of, and rendered her one of the greatest favourites upon whom their sanction had ever been bestowed. She was tall, genteel, and well shaped; her pleasing and expressive features were enlivened by large speaking eyes, which, in some particular comic situations, were kept half shut, especially when she intended to realise some brilliant idea; in sprightliness of air, and elegance of manner, she excelled all actresses; and was greatly superior in the strength, compass, and harmony of her voice.

Though highly appreciated as a tragic performer, Mrs. Oldfield, in the full round of glory, used to slight her best personations of that sort, and would often say, "I hate to have a page dragging my train about. Why don't they give Porter those parts? She can put on a better tragedy face than I can." The constant applause by which she was followed in characters of this description, so far reconciled her to Melpomene, that the last new one in which she appeared was Thomson's *Sophonisba*. Upon her action and deportment the author has expressed himself with great ardour in the following lines:

to relate : or, as it might set some persons living in a light they possibly might not chuse to be seen in, I will rather

Mrs. Oldfield, in the character of *Sophonisba*, has excelled what, even in the fondness of an author, I could either wish or imagine. The grace, dignity, and happy variety, of her action have been universally applauded, and are truly admirable.

Thomson's praise, indeed, is not more liberal than just, for we learn, that in reply to some degrading expression of *Massinissa*, relating to Carthage, she uttered the following line,—

Not one base word of Carthage, for thy soul!—

with such grandeur of port, a look so tremendous, and in a voice so powerful, that it is said she even astonished Wilks, her *Massinissa* ; it is certain the audience were struck, and expressed their feelings by the most uncommon applause. (1) Testimony like this is sufficient to protect her claim to tragic excellence, eclipsed as it certainly is by the superiority of her comic reputation.

*Lady Townly* has been universally adduced as her *ne plus ultra* in acting. She slid so gracefully into the foibles, and displayed so humourously the excesses, of a fine woman too sensible of her charms, too confident in her strength, and led away by her pleasures, that no succeeding *Lady Townly* arrived at her many distinguished excellencies in the character. By being a welcome and constant visitor to families of distinction, Mrs. Oldfield acquired a graceful carriage in representing women of high rank, and expressed their sentiments in a manner so easy, natural, and flowing, that they appeared to be of her own genuine utterance. Notwithstanding her amorous connexions (2) were publicly known, she

(1) "Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. 3, p. 437.

(2) It is supposed that she was engaged in a tender intercourse with Farquhar, and was the "Penelope" of his amatory correspondence. She lived

be thankful for the involuntary favour they have done me, than trouble the public with private complaints of fancied or real injuries.

was invited to the houses of women of fashion, as conspicuous for unblemished character as elevated rank. Even the royal family did not disdain to see Mrs. Oldfield at their levees. George the Second and Queen Caroline, when Prince and Princess of Wales, often condescended to converse with her. One day the Princess told Mrs. Oldfield, she had heard that General Churchill and she were married: "So it is said, may it please your royal highness," replied Mrs. Oldfield, "but we have not owned it yet."

In private, Mrs. Oldfield was generous, humane, witty, and well-bred. Though she disliked the man, and disapproved of his conduct, yet the misfortunes of Savage recommended him to her pity, and she often relieved him by a handsome donation. Her influence with Walpole contributed to procure his pardon when convicted, on false evidence, of murder, and adjudged to death, a fate which his most unnatural mother did her utmost to enforce. It is not true that she either allowed this poet an annuity, or admitted his conversation, (3) but still the benefits she did confer upon him were quite numerous enough to warrant his celebration of her memory. The goodness of her heart, and the splendour of her talents, were topics upon which Savage might have ventured to insist, without endangering his piety or wounding his pride. Dr. Johnson has sanctioned the silence of this author, (4) on the grounds of Mrs. Oldfield's condition; but that dogmatic man

successively with Arthur Manwaring, one of the most accomplished characters of his age, and General Churchill; by each of whom she had a son.

(3) This fact is firmly denied in Cibber's "Lives of the Poets," and with a pointed reference to Johnson's admission of it. Vol. 5, p. 33.

(4) Savage, however, was *not* silent; though he abstained from putting his name to the poem, he indisputably wrote upon Mrs. Oldfield's death. It is preserved in Chetwood's "History."

would have shown a truer taste for benevolence, had he recommended the most ardent devotion to individuals of any stamp, who were actuated by so glorious a principle.

Pope, who seems to have persecuted the name of player with a malignancy unworthy of his genius, has stigmatised the conversation of Mrs. Oldfield by the word "*Oldfieldismos*," which he printed in Greek characters; nor can there be a doubt that he meant her by the dying coquette, in one of his epistles. That Mrs. Oldfield was touched by the vanity of weak minds, and drew an absurd importance from the popularity of her low station, may be fairly inferred, and might have been fairly derided; (5) but Pope, with his usual want of candour, has appealed to less tangible failings, and tried, as in most cases, much more to ridicule the person than correct the fault. I do not dispute the brilliancy of his sarcasm, but I would rather hail the rigour of his justice. (6)

Mrs. Oldfield died on the 23d of October, 1730, most sincerely lamented by those to whom her general value was not unknown.

\*Wilks died on the 27th of September, 1732, and not in 1731, as Cibber relates, and was buried at midnight, by his own desire, to avoid ostentation, in the church of St. Paul, Covent-garden, where a monument was erected to his memory.

The fame of Wilks's efforts stands lower with posterity than it stood in his own time, when he was not considered *merely* as the fine gentleman of the stage, but possessed a high reputation for

(5) What can be more ridiculous than the following anecdote?

Mrs. Oldfield happened to be in some danger in a Gravesend boat, and when the rest of the passengers lamented their approaching fate, she, with a conscious dignity, told them their deaths would be only a private loss;—"But I am a public concern."—"Dramatic Miscellanies;" vol. I, p. 226.

(6) The bitterness of Pope's muse subsided upon no occasion, where the name of Mrs. Oldfield might be aptly introduced. Thus in the "Sober Advice from Horace," one of his inedited poems:

Engaging Oldfield! who, with grace and ease,  
Could join the arts to ruin and to please.



his talents in tragic characters. Upon the death of Betterton he succeeded to the part of *Hamlet*, and perhaps a short view of the manner in which this and other parts were played, will justify the very warm light in which I wish to place his serious assumptions.

"To beseech gracefully, to approach respectfully, to pity, to mourn, to love, are the places," says Steele, (1) "wherein Wilks may be made to shine with the utmost beauty." That he understood the tender passions in a superior degree is also the record of an honest observer, (2) and when these attributes are combined with his tall, erect person, his pleasing aspect, and his elegant address, no unfavourable notion will perhaps be entertained of his fitness for tragic success.

His *Prince of Wales* was one of the most perfect exhibitions of the theatre. He threw aside the libertine gaiety of Hal, when he assumed the princely deportment of *Henry*; at the Boar's-head he was lively and frolicsome; in the reconciliation with his father, his penitence was ingenuous, and his promises of amendment were manly and affecting. In the challenge of *Hotspur*, his defiance was equally bold and modest; and his triumph over that impatient rebel was tempered by generous regret.

To the reader of "*Henry the Eighth*," the part of *Buckingham* may seem to be of little or no importance; but there is an affecting pathos in it which the actor of merit will exemplify by his powerful elocution. Wilks thought *Buckingham* intitled to his notice, and in the very first scene of it, the resentment borne by the character against *Wolsey*, broke out, in Wilks, with an impetuosity that was not to be restrained. His action was vehement, and his step hurried; but, when condemned, his demeanour was pathetic and gentle, and his grief such as it became a Christian to display.

(1) "Tattler," No. 182.

(2) Davies, in his "Dramatic Miscellanies."

The *Castalio* of Wilks was long and justly admired. In delicacy of address to ladies, he surpassed the best actors, except Barry, by whom he has been succeeded, and the charm of his manner in approaching *Monimia*, at their first interview, may be easily imagined. His delight at their reconciliation in the second act, his rage and resentment in the third and fourth; and, above all, his tenderness and misery in the fine meeting that embellishes the fifth, justly intitled him to the spectator's most generous approbation.

Wilks appeared in *Hamlet*, for the first time, on Wednesday the 26th of July, 1710, but a few weeks after Steele had termed him a "perfect actor," and "the first of the present stage." In speaking that impassioned soliloquy which discloses *Hamlet's* method to 'catch the conscience of the king,' Wilks had an ample field to display the warmth of his disposition. He felt the various passions of it with energy, and expressed them with vehemence, but to give strength to sentiment, he would occasionally strike the syllables with too much ardour, and, in the judicious ear, create something like dissonance rather than harmony. The great piece of self-communion upon death, he spoke with a pleasing melancholy of countenance, and grave despondency of action. In the assumed madness with *Ophelia*, which Garrick, in good opinions, made too boisterous, Wilks retained enough of covered insanity, but at the same time preserved the feelings of a lover, and the delicacy of a gentleman. If the critics justly blamed Wilks for his behaviour to the *Ghost*, in the first act, they could not possibly censure his conduct with his mother in the third. His action was there a happy mixture of warm indignation, allayed by the most affecting tenderness; his whole deportment was princely and graceful: when he presented the pictures, the reproaches his animation produced were guarded with filial reluctance, and when he came to the pathetic exclamation,

Mother, for love of grace!

there was something in his manner inexpressibly gentle, and pow-

erfully persuasive. Wilks, indeed, was so successful in his representation of this part, that "Hamlet" was frequently chosen, as a favourite play, to open the season with.

Wilks established his reputation by *Sir Harry Wildair*, a part into which he entered with the careless gaiety of a young man, whose high spirits and plentiful fortune threw a gloss over the greatest extravagancies he could commit. *Wildair*, it has been remarked, presents but few intermissions of wit or humour; the whole play was looked upon 'as something too low to bear a criticism,' (3) at the time of its appearance; and Wilks's success was therefore heightened by the presumptive inferiority of his author. So powerful was the impression created by Wilks in this character, that Steele reprehends the audience for turning their attention to it, while he was performing any other part. (4) In *Lord Townly*, Wilks has also been justly commended. He was so much the fine gentleman, that in the scene where he felt reduced to the necessity of reproaching *Lady Townly* with her faults, he mixed a tenderness with his anger that softened into tears.

In a moral point of view, the memory of Wilks is endeared to us by the honesty of his dealings, and the benevolence of his temper. Chetwood avouches in strong terms for this goodness of heart, and the treatment of Farquhar's orphan family, for whom he provided with parental care, is a fact that corroborates the most favourable testimony. It is Johnson, I remember, who has passed a heavy censure upon actors in general, but the meanness of their conduct, if they are to be stigmatised as a body, is redeemed by many instances of liberal feeling.

(3) "Tattler," No. 19.

(4) "Tattler," No. 201.

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